







「え？なにって、
あついがちふくを
ぬいでいるに
きまっているだろう」

「お、おい！
何してんだよ
おまえ！」

まぢ！

Chapter 0: The Butler's Confession

“—I don't want us to be just friends anymore...!”

The summer festival was at its height, the fireworks roaring in the sky, and yet Konoe tried her best to convey these words with all her might.

“...What?” Unable to say anything, I just returned a blank question.

She doesn't want to stay just as friends. These were the words I heard all too clearly, despite this loud ambient noise.

“.....”

No no no no, hold on. What's that supposed to mean. What meaning is she even using here? This is worse than anything I anticipated. What a pinch. If this was a volleyball or basketball team, the coach would be taking a timeout right about now, but sadly life doesn't have such a convenient function.

Hence, I had to use my own thoughts, and had my brain cells do the heavy lifting. If she says that being just friends isn't good enough... then she wants to become something more than friends?

“...!”

H-Huh? Weird. Wait a second. No matter how I think about it, that phrase just now could only mean...!?

“...Ah, y-you're wrong!” Konoe must have felt awkward seeing me quiet for such a long time, and frantically opened her mouth.

“Wrong...with what?”

“~~~! T-That just now...wasn't a confession or anything.” The dear butler explained with flapping hands.

If that wasn't a confession...then what was it?

"That's why...Um...What I said wasn't a confession or anything like that..." Konoe repeated herself, and another silence followed.

She seemed to be thinking about something.

".....Best friends."

"Best friends?"

"That's right! I want us to become best friends! So don't get the wrong idea, that just now wasn't a confession or anything! It definitely wasn't like that!"

"Yeah yeah, I got that part already."

But, best friends? That sure came out of nowhere.

"It should be fine, right? Before, you called another classmate of yours like that."

"Kurose? Well, it's true that we go back a long time."

I've had him around for the longest time after all. We've known each other since middle school, and lived through a lot. Now, these are all important memories.

"Do you...not want to?" Konoe asked with a worried voice.

She put her hands together in front of her chest, like she was praying for something.

"Do you not want to become best friends with me, Jirou? If so, that's fine. I don't want you to hate me, so..."

"H-Hold on! Why would you suddenly arrive at that!?"

"B-Because you wouldn't respond at all..."

"I was just surprised because that came out of nowhere. There's no way I'd be against it."

“...Eh? Then...”

“Yeah, let’s.” In order to reassure Konoe, I strongly nodded.

Best friends. If you were to give it another more direct word, it would be ‘Dear friend’, right. It sounds pretty embarrassing alright, but I don’t hate it. How could I? If she’s happy, then I’m happy.

“Come on, let’s shake hands to seal the deal.”

“...T-Thanks...”

When I offered my hand, Konoe took it with her small one. As a result, I felt her warm palm. Since it would activate my gynophobia again, we only held hands for a brief moment.

“But, why’d you suddenly bring it up? You surprised me.” I asked after pulling my hand away.

I mean, Konoe and I would often eat lunch together, so we’re pretty close, but that sure came out of the blue...

“Ah..that’s...We couldn’t see each other as much because of summer break, so I just wanted to reconfirm our friendship...!”

“I mean, we really aren’t meeting each other every day, but with the classes outside the curriculum, we’ve been seeing each other here and there, right.”

The Private Rouran Academy we are attending has these super annoying outside-of-term classes, which force you to come to school despite the heat basically killing you. It’s so annoying.

“~~~! W-What’s it matter!? It’s not that awful of a thing, right!” Konoe sounded like she desperately tried to explain herself.

Well, whatever. Maybe it really was just on a whim.

“Either way, let’s get along, best friend.”

Amidst the explosions in the sky, I said those words to Konoe. Summer break is going to end eventually, and the second term will

start. That's why, this isn't so bad—becoming best friends with Konoe.



“...Yeah, that's right. We are...best friends.”

And yet, Konoe's expression didn't look as happy as I was hoping it to be. Something's weird. But, she was the one who brought it up first, so she must be happy no doubt. If I had to guess—she's probably just

embarrassed. Coming to this conclusion, I averted my eyes from the girl, and enjoyed the fireworks filling the sky.

Chapter 1: Hic!

This might be a sudden switch in topic, but how do you feel about extracurricular classes? I personally hate them. Who thought it was a good idea to have classes in the middle of summer break? Why do I have to walk outside while being boiled in a solid 38°C? Why can't you just let me roll around in my room, in the grace of the almighty A/C, and read some manga to relax?

Today is the 27th of August, roughly two weeks after the whole elopement trip dilemma. What left me especially melancholic is that today was the last day of extracurricular classes.

“Jirou-kun, don't you think extracurricular classes are quite boring?”

Compared to what I was feeling, the voice calling out to me sounded quite refreshed. When I looked over at the seat next to mine, there sat a rich lady wearing a special frilly goth lolita uniform—Suzutsuki Kanade. As she made her black twintails shake with a swift motion, she showed a gentle smile.

As you can see, I'm sitting next to Suzutsuki. Unfortunately, when we pulled a lottery for the seat changing, I happened to luck out and ended up right next to her. I'm being cursed for sure. Rather than sitting next to her, I'd prefer covering my body with honey, and asking for a handshake from a grizzly bear.

After all, we're talking about that rich lady who loves teasing a bit too much, Devil Suzutsuki. The others probably didn't realize it yet, but I know. She might have a cute face, but her real personality is a sadistic queen with retorts like she's from Down*own. Most troublesome is that she recently took great joy in teasing me. Because of this troublesome personality, my life has pretty much been hell ever since I moved up to my second year.

“Hey, Jirou-kun.”

“Shut up. You're an honor student, so listen to class like an honor student would.”

Because of our seats in the furthest back, Suzutsuki would often call out to me in such a quiet voice that only I could hear her. Does she really have to make my extracurricular lessons even worse?

“I’m bored after all. I always study at home, so this is nothing new.”

“I don’t, so leave me be.”

“So it would be troublesome if you got poked out by the teacher?”

“Yeah, very much so.”

“I’m sure a lot of blood would come out if he stabbed you.”

“That’s what you meant!?”

“Your final words are ‘Damn it, if only I properly revised everything yesterday...!’ by the way.”

“I feel like revising anything wouldn’t save me from that situation!”

“Then you have to make sure and not miss out on your revising.”

“What good would that do if I died!?”

“I will get revenge for you.”

“Revenge!?”

“This was—the beginning of another extracurricular lesson for the girl.”

“Don’t just end this conversation with a prologue like that!”

What an awful extracurricular class this is. So many regrets filling me.

“Isn’t that fine? Summer break is about to end, and the second-term will begin.”

“I don’t want to be killed off that early.”

“Summer break was fun after all.”

“Well, going to the sea and all that were some great memories.”

“A lot happened, yeah. Like how you turned into the prey of a lightsaber at the beach.”

“Life saver. Don’t purposefully say the wrong thing.”

Where are the Jedi coming out from now? Also, what is that prey part about? The one who was buried in the sand was the old man, not me.

“...Jeetz.”

Well, this is how things are. Because I ended up in this seat, that rich lady would bother me as soon as the boredom got the better of her, forcing me to tag along. Not to mention right at the time I was about to fall asleep. It’s almost like she’s trying to keep me awake, but only doing the worst things possible.

“Jirou-kun.”

“What? You’re still not done? We shouldn’t be talking any more than this.”

Luckily, our teacher right now is the 24-year old Yamagawa-sensei, standing directly in front of the teacher’s desk. She’s a bit of an airhead, but she doesn’t warn you even if you talk a bit in the back. Thanks to that, the people around us were also whispering to themselves. But, with how far we’ve taken it, I wouldn’t be surprised if she’d tick off soon.

“A bit more should be fine. Not to mention that this is the perfect chance.”

“Chance?”

“Indeed. After all, Subaru isn’t here right now.”

“Not here right now...”

She’s right here, sitting in the very front. When I looked over at her, I spotted Konoe diligently listening to the class. That’s Subaru-sama for

you, she's not just putting on a fake mask like a certain someone else.

"I'm saying that she won't be able to hear us. See, whenever we run into each other, Subaru is mostly with us. We barely get any chances to talk just as the two of us."

"...Hm."

She's not wrong, alright. After all, we're talking about that crossdressing butler, she'll always loiter around her master. This is a rare situation, alright.

"That's why this is a chance. There's actually something I wanted to ask you, Jirou-kun." Suzutsuki took a deep breath, and continued. "Did something happen between you and Subaru?" She asked with no hesitation.

"...Huh? Where did that come from."

"Just answer me. She's been acting off as of late. Almost like she's avoiding you."

"....." I lost my words.

Avoiding? Subaru is avoiding me? Um, really? Though, now that she says it, ever since we agreed to 'become best friends' during those fireworks, we didn't talk as much. But, besides that, I can't really think of anything.

"No idea. I don't think so at least."

"Really?"

"Yeah. But, why are you asking me? Why not confront Konoe about that directly."

"...Because that didn't work." Suzutsuki let out a melancholic sigh.

Hmm, that's a rare sight. We're talking about the unparalleled and unfazeable devil, so seeing her melancholic was worrying.

"The thing is, I asked her about that yesterday, but she changed the

topic.”

“Changed the topic...”

So even Konoe went against her master? That’s something I find trouble believing.

“If anything, she reacted along the lines of ‘Why are you asking me about that!?', you know.”

“So what exactly did you ask her?”

“Eh? ‘Subaru, what color is your underwear today’, of course.”

“So the question was at fault, I see!”

“Maybe she’s wearing such obscene underwear that she can’t tell me?”

“Your point of worrying is completely messed up!”

“It’s fine, I properly asked about the important part?”

“Eh?”

“This is what I asked her: ‘Subaru, what color is your underwear today? is what you would like Jirou-kun to ask, right?', you see.”

“I can see why she’d avoid you, alright!”

“Be honest with me. I will forgive any sin you may have committed.”

“Objection! If you actually asked Konoe properly, she would surely answer you!”

“Really? Do you truly think she will give me proof?”

“Wha...”

“I mean, think about it. If you asked her ‘Subaru, show me that your underwear today is white’, then she’ll be embarrassed, saying ‘I-I understand, Master...’ as she takes off her clothes.”

“That’s not what I wanted her to prove!”

What kind of erotic roleplay is that supposed to be? Also, that’s harder to prove than most of the math problems we’re doing in school.

“Well, leaving all jokes aside, do you really have no idea? Judging from my instinct, I feel like it’s related to you.”

“.....”

Even if you ask me that...Let me think about it...Is there any problem that happened recently...

“Think carefully. I’m worried that Subaru might be trying to deal with something on her own. With how diligent she is, she won’t rely on other people until it’s already too late.”

“I mean, I know that.”

It was the same with her phobia of knives. Because of that, she and Suzutsuki drifted apart, but...

“.....”

Is this...what she’s afraid of? That we’ll stop being friends?

“Let me ask you again. Do you not have any idea? Anything is fine. Something you might have realized, just tell me any...Hic!”

“Hic?”

...Was that just my imagination, or did Suzutsuki let out quite the adorable voice just now.

“Hic!”

“.....”

Calm down, Sakamachi Kinjiro. You might have heard some cute voice coming out of Suzutsuki’s mouth, but I’m just daydreaming, I bet. After all, this is Suzutsuki Kanade we’re talking about. The cool

beauty, the unattainable flower of this school, admired by everybody, and a perfect human being. She would not have any weakness like that.

So, now I'm supposed to believe she could be this adorable? Also, that last 'Hic!' was much louder than before. I must be mishearing things.

"Hey, what was that voice? That sounded adorable."

Urk.

"Yeah, I heard it too. I feel like it came from behind me."

Despite being in the middle of class, the classroom grew noisy. The reason for that was undoubtedly 'Hic!'. Yeah, something doesn't add up. Was I...not just mishearing things?

"H-Hey, Suzutsuki?" I called out to her in a quiet voice.

There sat Suzutsuki Kanade, covering her mouth with both her hands, completely frozen stiff. Rarely enough, her eyes were open in shock.

"You alright? Are you not feeling well?"

"...Eh? W-Why would you think that?"

"I mean, you keep going 'Hic!', right?"

"T-That's just your imagination. Think about it, Jirou-kun, how would I suddenly make myself sound like some anime characters."

"But..."

"You sure are obstinate. I'm saying everything's okay hic."

"Okay hic!?"

"...Ah, you're wrong hic! This isn't what you think hic!"

"....."

...S-She's broken. This is bad, our dear Suzutsuki-san is broken.

“D-Don’t give me such a condescending gaze hic!” Suzutsuki kept adding an adorable ‘Hic!’ at the end.

The heck is that. Is this some new Deretsuki-san pattern? Is she changing? She’s not going to say ‘I have about two transformations left’¹. Either way, things are turning grim. The classroom grew more noisy. It won’t take long until they realize who is the cause of these sounds.

“Yamakawa-sensei!” There, an alto voice broke between the noise.

It was Konoe. She stood up with her hand in the air.

“I’m sorry, the young lady doesn’t seem to be feeling well, so I’ll be taking her to the infirmary.”

“Ehh? Even if you say that, that’s...” Yamakawa-sensei was at a loss because of this sudden development.

I mean, was she always like this? Her reaction is even confusing me.

“Hm, it can’t be helped. Would you mind stepping out in the hallway with me? I would like to discuss some things.” Konoe seemed a bit agitated, as she grabbed Yamakawa-sensei’s sleeve, dragging her outside the classroom.

I guess she’s trying to forcefully lecture her? Around thirty seconds passed, when the classroom door opened, and Yamakawa-sensei returned all alone.

“Suzutsuki-san, hurry up and go to the infirmary.”

So fast! Even the students around me were shocked. I mean, that attitude is just too different compared to before. Just what did they talk about in the hallway...

“Also, you’re going with her, Sakamachi-kun.”

“Huuuh!?” Not expecting this turn of events, I shot up from my chair.

No no no no, why is she adding me in that? I might be lucky that I get to skip classes, but the bad premonition I get in return doesn’t

seem all too lucrative.

“Sensei, what is this about! Please explain yourself!” Naturally, I protested.

However, Yamakawa-sensei remained calm, and explained like it was nothing special.

“I mean, your grades are so bad.”

“Excuse me!?”

“I’ve been thinking about this for a while now, so maybe you should just get checked out?”

“You don’t need to blindside me with that, okay!”

“That’s why you should hurry and undergo that operation.”

“Our infirmary doesn’t have that kind of equipment!”

“Q-Quiet! You’re not allowed to talk back to a teacher!”

“Wha...”

“If you don’t hurry up, you’ll get scolded by Konoe-sensei, you know!”

“Why are you calling Konoe with ‘Sensei’!?”

You’re the teacher here! Damn it, I bet Konoe somehow threatened her to say these things! I doubt it was with the use of violence, but to think she managed to bend Yamakawa-sensei like that...!

“Thank you very much, Yamakawa-sensei.” Suzutsuki spoke up with a faint giggle.

Like that, she stood up from her seat, and pulled me along outside the classroom. So we’re doing this after all...

“I’ve been waiting for you, young lady.”

Right as we stepped out of the classroom, Konoe greeted us.

“Young lady, that ‘Hic!’ just now, is that...”

“Yes, just as you imagine it hic. Really, how troublesome, I didn’t think it would happen here.”

The butler and master talked as we walked down the empty hallway. Happen...so this ‘Hic!’ is connected to Suzutsuki after all?

“Konoe, what is this about?”

I’ve been dragged out here, so I deserve an explanation. That’s what I had in mind when asking, but...

“Urk...”

For some reason, Konoe averted her gaze, looking away...Eh? What kind of reaction was that? Is Konoe actually avoiding me after all?

“Jirou-kun, let me explain hic.” Suzutsuki spoke up, taking over.

She’s still adding that odd ‘Hic!’ at the end of her sentences. But, it’s not after every one, so it must be random.

“I actually have a secret I haven’t told anybody at this school.”

“A secret?”

“That’s right hic. Just to let you know, I don’t sound like an anime character on purpose. In reality—this is my one weakness.” She announced, and once again let out a cute ‘Hic!’ at the end.

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“Hiccups?”

We reached the infirmary, and with the nurse Nakamoto-sensei absent, it was absolutely empty besides us three.

“That’s right, hiccups hic. Once I start having them, they just won’t stop that easily. See, like this hic.”

“Like this...”

This only sounds like you're purposefully adding it at the end of your sentences, you know.

"My hiccups are a bit more distinct. So, they often end up right when my sentences end hic. The reason I had you come with us Jirou-kun is to have you help me get rid of it."

She said, and kept adding 'Hic hic hic!' at the end of her sentences. I see, so they activate at the end of her sentence, and happen in irregular intervals.

"But, why is that your weakness? You're just having hiccups, right."

"Well, about that..." Suzutsuki let out a sigh, and continued.

"Apparently people think I'm cute when I suffer from hiccups like this."

"....."

...That's crazy. So she says. Didn't think she'd be so easy to praise herself. I mean, it is cute, so I'll forgive her.

"Don't get the wrong idea, hic. This is what I think is the case, hic."

It seems like she read my mind, and even answered accordingly. Now that she mentions it, we're talking about Suzutsuki Kanade, this whole hiccuping creates somewhat of an adorable gap. When I think of Suzutsuki, who is always calm and collected, letting out cute voices, she just starts looking cute...Wait, why is my heart racing like this?

"...Calm down hic, Jirou-kun." Thanks to those words, I returned to reality.

Before I realized it, I had taken a step towards Suzutsuki...Eh? What was I about to...

"Don't tell me...!"

I was about to...hug her. All of it subconsciously?

"The young lady's hiccups are like the devil's whispers." Konoe

muttered, as she stepped between me and Suzutsuki.

She sounded as cold and annoyed as always.

“It might be hard to believe, but when people—especially of the opposite sex—hear the young lady’s hiccups, they are entranced by her charm.”

“Entranced...”

You’re kidding, right? Her hiccups can control people’s minds?

“It’s true. It probably is the adorable ‘hic’ that gets them. Considering her usual calm attitude and diligent behaviour, this sudden cuteness creates a gap too strong for most to handle. This has already caused incidents in the past.”

“Incidents?”

“Around eight years ago, when she was still in grade school, the young lady was called to the party of a politician.”

“Why would she?”

“It’s not that odd of a thing, right? The Suzutsuki Family is quite renowned. The board chairman of this school, the young lady’s father, was asked to participate, so she joined him. However, her hiccups flared up during this party...”

“.....”

I can already see it in my head. Back then, Suzutsuki Kanade was still young. Even so, she might have held a mature atmosphere already. So when she shows up at this party with a frilly dress, looking like a doll, with adorable features, she would naturally gather the attention of people. With that, she must have gathered even more attention easily.

“...Urk.”

Just thinking about it had me stagger. After all, it’s ‘Hic!’, you know. She looks like a doll, acts mature, and yet suddenly goes ‘Hic!’. The

exact opposite of what a noble lady would normally act like...I bet the people around her were just...

“It’s exactly what you’re thinking, Jirou.” Konoe must have guessed what I was thinking, and muttered. “To be frank, around seven minutes after her hiccups started—chaos ensued.”

“C-Chaos...!”

“We had people saying ‘I’ll fix the young lady’s hiccups!’ or ‘Who is the parent of this child! I’ll adopt her...No, marry her immediately!’ or ‘Sooo cuuuuuute I wanna take her home!’ and so on...Almost all participants had similar reactions, and were creating a mess.”

“Those guys should keep their own age in mind, alright!”

Back then, Suzutsuki was in grade school at best! Those are not things you should say to a girl her age. Especially if you’re a politician with a lot of influence. Can you really leave the country to them? I feel like this country is lost.

“In the end, the security guards and employees couldn’t do anything anymore, and the police had to be contacted. This incident later became known as the ‘Hiccup Chaos’ inside the Suzutsuki Family.”

“.....”

What a stupid story, and yet it’s oddly believable.

“The second time this happened was four years ago. Since the young lady was inside her residence, one of the male servants taking care of her became a living dead, close to destroying the entire residence. This became known as the ‘Suzutsuki Family Biohazard Incident’. Still, that just now was mighty dangerous...” Konoe sighed in relief.

Four years ago...and then eight years ago...Does it happen in four-year-intervals? No no no, this isn’t some odd olympic superpower.

“Man...”

Just as Konoe said, that was dangerous. If Suzutsuki’s hiccups had continued in that classroom, we might not have been able to escape

this easily. That class is full of Suzutsuki fans after all.

“But, big respect for you, Konoe.”

“Eh?”

Because of my honest praise, that butler looked at me in shock.

“I mean, you’re hearing Suzutsuki’s ‘Hic!’ and are totally fine.”

Even I was close to losing my reason there. I mean, she might be wearing male clothes, and is actually a girl deep down, but she still should have some trouble restraining herself.

“T-That is something obvious, as I am her butler after all!” Konoe hesitated a bit, but eventually bragged a bit.

She seemed to have been happy being praised like that. She’s even grinning to herself. Her expressions are as easy to guess as a puppy’s.

“That’s right, you are the greatest butler there is, Subahic.”

“E-Even the young lady...! Thank you very much...!”

Receiving such honest words of gratitude, Konoe’s face lit up with a blooming smile, and she lowered her head—Hmmm?

“...Hey, Konoe.”

“What’s wrong, Jirou? Are you...going to praise me even more?”

“No, not exactly...I was just wondering what you were doing.”

“...? What are you talking about, I am merely lowering my head towards the young lady’s grateful words, and...Ah!?”

Because I pointed it out first, the dear Butler-kun realized what was going on. She was clinging to Suzutsuki. It might have felt to her like she was merely lowering her head, but in reality she swiftly approached Suzutsuki, and hugged her like she was a hugging pillow. Not to mention that she buried her face in Suzutsuki’s chest.



“...Subaru?”

“Ah! You’re wrong, young lady! It’s definitely not like I was thinking ‘The always cool young lady is sounding so cute right now!’, or anything like that!”

“So you were thinking that, hic.”

“...! I-I was not hic! There is a very important reason for this hic...!”
Butler-kun desperately tried to make up any worthwhile excuse.

...She's done for. She's even falling victim to the 'Hic!' by using it herself.

“I got it already, hic. Just get away from me hic.”

“Ehhh!? I don't want that! I want to hug this adorable young lady a bit more...Wait, no! I'm sorry I'm sorry! I'll get away immediately!”

“Konoe? You alright?”

“Shut up! You be quiet, Jirou! Or do you plan on stealing the young lady from me!?”

“The hell are you talking about!?”

“I won't allow that! Purge! I shall use my power as a butler and purge you!”

“S-Stop! Calm down! Start counting sheep!”

“...Eh? Wait, what was I even doing?”

Right as Konoe grasped some scissors in the infirmary and pointed them at me, she stopped. Or rather, she regained her senses...This is dangerous. Deretsuki-san's second transformation is far too dangerous to be left alone. To think she could even influence her own butler like that.

“Subaru, you go back to the main family now, hic.” Seeing her butler break down like that must have left an impression on Suzutsuki, as she gave this unusual order.

In response, Konoe let out a shocked ‘Wha!?’.

“N-No way! How could you say that!?”

“It's simple, hic. You go back to the main residence, and bring things that should help with stopping my hiccups, hic.”

“H-However...!”

“Also, to be perfectly frank with you, you won’t be of any help even if you stay with me right now.”

“Wha...!”

“A butler who can’t resist her master’s cuteness and clinging to her like that isn’t making things better, hic.”

“Urk...Y-You’re not wrong, but...”

Konoe must have been reminded of her previous actions, as she lowered her head, looking like a puppy that just got scolded by its owner. Without many more words, she reluctantly left the infirmary.

“Hey, are you sure about that? Just sending her home like that.”

I seriously thought she’d keep her around to try and figure out ways of dispelling this dangerous hiccuping. And I feel bad for her being scolded like that.

“Rest assured, hic. She was planning on heading home from the very beginning, hic.”

“From the very beginning?”

“Think about it, hic. Subaru probably hasn’t realized, but if she wanted something from the residence, she could have just used her phone to have it delivered, hic.”

“...Ah.”

Right, they could have used the servants at the residence like some pizza delivery and bring over anything they needed.

“But then, why would she...”

“You don’t remember, hic? What happens when it comes to nursing people back to health.”

“Urk.”

I completely forgot. I might have tried to suppress those memories from last Golden Week. Because I was down with a cold, Konoe tried her best to nurse me back to health, and only almost killed me in the process. More accurately, she had me eat some mysterious food, tied me up on the bed, and stripped me naked.

“Knowing her, she’s probably thinking ‘I’ll fix the young lady’s hiccups no matter what’, which is why I reluctantly pushed her away.”

“Well, it sucks that the person in question doesn’t have any ill intent behind it.”

My little sister is a similar type compared to that. Back in grade school, when I fell down and scraped my knee, Kureha was still in kindergarten, and she suddenly started some doctor roleplay with ‘It’s fine! I’ll put it together with instant glue!’. Just remembering it makes me shake in terror.

“Well, I would have loved to see Subaru earnestly try to help me, hic.”

“I bet it’d be adorable, but you’re trading your own life for that.”

She would surely die in the process, but at least she’d be transported to heaven in the most gentle way. Well, leaving that aside...

“...? What’s wrong, hic.” Suzutsuki must have caught on to my gaze, as she asked me.

Hmmm...how do I say this, this ain’t half bad.

“I never expected you had such a weakness.”

The way she panicked in the classroom before, she was probably trying her hardest to hide it from me, but to think I would see Suzutsuki like that one day. It was a treat, truly.

“Wha...why are you grinning like that, hic! It’s not that funny, hic.”

She must have felt embarrassed to have her one weakness found out, as she faintly bit her lip with a pout. Waaah, that gesture is so fresh,

and adorable. I don't think I will ever get this chance a second time. I guess I should be happy about this incident after all. Thanks a bunch, hiccups.

"Do you understand? This is no big deal at all, hic."

"Sorry, sorry, you don't need to act tough or anything like that. Having a weakness like that makes you much more humane, and I like that."

"So you didn't think of me as human before, hic."

"....."

Ah crap. I said too much. Having this pointed out, I was at a loss for words.

"Fufu, it's fine, hic. I'll forgive you for now."

"...Eh?"

Because of this sudden turn of events, I was baffled. Suzutsuki closely inspected me, and let out another adorable 'Hic!' before...

"After all—now it's really just the two of us."

"!"

I heard these words clearly from her mouth, but it was already too late. Suzutsuki suddenly moved closer towards me, and pushed down my body. Unable to deal with this impact, I could not keep my balance, and fell directly onto the bed behind me. Suzutsuki didn't hesitate to move on top of the bed, ending up on top of me.

"U-Um, Suzutsuki-san?"

I am the oldest son of the Sakamachi Family, I was taught by Mom on how to escape such a hold, and yet I couldn't reenact it at all. I was like a frog being restrained by a snake. Suzutsuki's fierce gaze as she looked down at me would not allow me to move.

"Jirou-kun, tell me, hic." She gave me an oddly sadistic gaze, and

muttered. "What happened between you and Subaru, hic?"

"Again, nothing happened..."

"That's a lie. You should have seen her change in attitude towards you, hic."

"...I mean, I thought it was a bit weird, okay."

She was mostly just ignoring me, almost like back during the school festival. Maybe I made her angry in some way. But, I don't remember at all. All I can think of is that incident with the fireworks...

"It seems like you have an idea at least, hic."

"!?"

Because Suzutsuki guessed my thoughts, I twitched in shock. That damn Devil Suzutsuki, even if she sounds cute right now, she's got senses way too good.

"Hey, Jirou-kun. Tell me, hic."

"...Urk."

She brought her face closer towards me, like this was an attempt to seduce me. Not to mention that she still keeps ending her sentences with 'Hic!', which just makes her look more adorable in my eyes. However...

"...It's no good."

It felt like I shouldn't be telling Suzutsuki about that incident. That normally cold and distant Subaru-sama asked for us to be best friends. It didn't feel like something that should be spread to others. Even if it's that rich lady...

"I see, if you plan on staying quiet, hic...then I can only ask your body, hic."

"Eh?"

She showed a devilish smile as she sat on my hips.

“Now, I wonder how long you can bear with this, hic.” Suzutsuki smiled with pure enjoyment, and slowly started opening the buttons on my shirt.

I remember...when Konoe knocked me out with a fire extinguisher back in April, she stripped me of my clothes in the same way.

“...! Y-You wench, stop that!”

As expected, she slid her slender fingers between the openings of my shirt, touching my ribs.

“Urk!?” A voice distorted in agony escaped my lips, together with a hot sensation gathering at the tip of my nose.

Goosebumps ran along my body. Yet again, my gynophobia was activating.

“...D-Don’t take me so lightly.”

I haven’t suffered through all this past treatment program nonsense to just give in right away. I’ve gotten better at handling the symptoms compared to before.

“Oh my, aren’t you trying hard, hic.”

“O-Of course. Even if you torture me like this, you won’t get anything from me...!”

“You should just become more honest, hic. Why not be more frank with me like you would act around Subaru, hic...Ahh, I came up with something good.” Suzutsuki let out a snicker.

And then, she approached her soft-looking lips towards my ear. Almost like she was going to whisper into it.

“W-What are you doing?” I asked, slightly panicking.

She’s close. Her face is way too close. We’re at a distance where every single breath touched my neck and ears.

“Fufu, I’m just going to copy her a bit, hic.”

“Copy?”

“Indeed. When you’re talking with Subaru, you become quite honest, don’t you? That’s why I’m going to learn from her a bit, hic.”

Suzutsuki took a deep breath, and continued with a voice as sweet as candy. “.....Jirouuu.”

“~~~! Stop! Don’t call me like that!” My head immediately grew hot just by that single word.

...Crap, I didn’t expect her to copy Konoe’s tone of voice. She sometimes calls me like that, and it’s as explosive as always, even if it isn’t Konoe herself...!

“Jirouuuu...please, hic. Listen to me...” She sounded like she was pleading.

Ahhhh, what is this. A Konoe tone of voice plus the occasional ‘Hic!’ are way too destructive. Suzutsuki keeps looking more and more adorable to me. Adding to that, her feminine scent and fragrance, the sensation wherever our bodies touched, and her chest being pressed against me.

“Urk...!”

Gaaaaah this is torture after all! Even a spy from the CIA would break under this! This is no joke! Devil Suzutsuki really doesn’t hold back...!

“Please, Jirouuu...Hic...”

“...Grrrrr...”

I-I can’t. This is my limit. Since I’m always afraid and careful around Devil Suzutsuki, seeing her act this adorable is breaking down my defences. Her strawberry voice, her soft body, and my gynophobia, I’ve reached my limit already, and gone beyond that. I’m slowly being brainwashed by that rich lady.

“...Damn it.”

...Anybody is fine, just come and help me...And then...**Tap tap tap tap**. Of course, this isn't just me tapping my fingers in annoyance. Rather, these were footsteps, coming from the hallway. It seems like someone was heading over to the infirmary we found ourselves in.

“—This is bad, hic.” Right when Suzutsuki muttered these words, she moved next to me on the bed, and covered herself with the blanket.

From an outsider's perspective, it looked like it was just me resting in this bed. Though one side of the blanket being oddly bulky looks very fishy.

“...Phew.” I let out a relieved sigh.

Just a bit more, and I would have sold my soul to Suzutsuki. What a real devil she is.

“Jirou? Why are you sleeping on the bed there?” A confused alto voice reached my ears.

Konoe called out to me upon entering the infirmary.

“.....”

Now hold on, dear gods in the heavens above. I was asking for help, not for the creation of an even deeper level of hell.

“W-What's wrong? Did you go to your place?” I raised up my upper body, and asked Konoe.

Calm down, me...If this violent butler were to find out that Suzutsuki and I are basically snuggling together right now, it'll be a simple search & destroy match. I need to avoid this at all costs.

“I was thinking of going back to the residence at first, but right when I left the school, I realized I could just use my phone to contact them. That's why I'm back here now.” She said, and averted her face.

Hm, I guess she's avoiding me after all. Maybe I should just ask for the reason directly? Not like this is the time or place for that.

“By the way, where is the young lady? I don't see her at all. Did she

head to the toilet by any chance?”

“Y-Yeah, something like that.”

“I see. But, why are you sitting on that bed? Are you not feeling well?”

“I-I was just taking a break.”

“So why is your shirt open like that?”

“I-I was just feeling a bit hot, so I was trying to cool down.”

“You alright? Are you suffering from a summer cold?”

“I’m totally fine! It’s not that bad! So don’t approach me with that worried of an expression!”

This is what they mean by the saying ‘Walking on thin ice’, huh. With one wrong step, the ice will break, and I’ll probably drown.

“I’m really okay, I’ll be back to normal soon enough.”

“I-If you say so...” She still didn’t sound very convinced, and averted her face.

I’m concerned about her odd attitude, but this is a chance. As long as I can make her leave the infirmary again...

“...Hic!”

An adorable voice rang out amidst the silence....I forgot, Suzutsuki Kanade is literally a timebomb right now.

“...? Wasn’t that the young lady’s hiccup right now?”

“Eh?! I-I didn’t hear anything, you know...”

I tried to hide it, but another ‘Hic!’ rang out. This time, Konoe’s gaze grew much sharper compared to before.

“Jirou, is this some kind of prank you two came up with? Acting like the young lady went to the toilet, but in reality hiding in this room?”

Konoe started looking around the room like she was a dog sniffing out drugs.

She checked the open bed, beneath the desk, outside the window, inside the locker, eliminating possible hiding spots. This is just awful. It's only a matter of time until she checks out my bed. Once she finds out, it's over. I won't be able to escape. I'll be brought to court, and put into queue for the death penalty. Of course, being burned at stake sounds adequate.

"This has turned quite troublesome, Jirou-kun." Suzutsuki whispered.

Ahh, thank god. I guess even she has to take this situation, and danger to my being, seriously for once. That's right, there's no way she'd play around in this...

"This feels like we're playing hide and seek, it's so much fun."

You sadistic wench! Can you take things seriously for one damn second!? How can you enjoy this? I don't enjoy a game of hide and seek with my life on the line, alright. Konoe will not let me ever hide again if she finds me.

"Maybe I should spice things up a bit."

You really don't need to.

"What if I stripped naked beneath the blanket? That would probably make Subaru's heart stop."

Ahaha, if you did that, my heart would stop way before that.

"What do you think I should do, Jirou-kun?"

Don't ask me! And stop writing words on my thighs! Do your Japanese homework later! If I get a nosebleed here, I'll be found out immediately.

"Jirou, do you have a moment?"

"Eek!"

Konoe suddenly looked at me, very dubious about something.

“Would you mind letting me have a look beneath your blanket?”

“W-Why?”

“I mean, that’s the only explanation I could come up with. Also, your shirt...w-were you doing something illicit with the young lady while I was gone...!?” Konoe asked, emitting clear killing intent.

Urk, it’s over. The Bad End has caught up with me. I didn’t think my life would end here of all places. I have way too many regrets left. Maybe I should just curse these two for the rest of their lives...!

“Calm down, Jirou-kun.”

There, Suzutsuki spoke up with a voice quiet enough that only I could hear it.

“I came up with something. If you use this plan, you’ll make it out of here alive. Listen—”

“!?”

The second I heard what her plan was about, I swallowed my breath. She’s going to force me to do something so embarrassing?

“What’s wrong? If you don’t hurry up, they’ll release a newspaper article about you, with the headline being ‘Male high school student murdered in the infirmary’.”

“Urk...”

No other choice but to do it. Anything’s better than being slaughtered by that butler. If I want to make it out of here, I can only obey Suzutsuki’s orders...!

“What’s wrong? Is there a reason I can’t look beneath that blanket?”

“Y-Yeah, there is. It’s a very crucial reason.” I said exactly what Suzutsuki ordered me to.

In response, Konoe raised one eyebrow.

“Then, tell me. I’m quite curious about this reason now.”

If it’s any half-baked reason, then you’re dead—that’s the pressure I got from Konoe. That’s why I can’t pull back anymore.

“The thing is...”

I don’t even care anymore. I’ll just follow Suzutsuki’s orders.

“—I’m not wearing anything beneath the blanket.”

“...What?”

As expected, Konoe froze up beautifully upon hearing my words.

“J-Jirou, what did you say just now?”

“Let me say it again. I’m not wearing anything beneath this blanket. No pants, no underwear, nothing.”

“Bare naked!? Why!? And why in the school infirmary!?” Konoe asked, her eyes distorted in shock.

Of course, I agreed with the template answers Suzutsuki gave me.

“That’s the kind of hobby I have.”

“Hobby!? Revealing your lower body in the school infirmary!?”

“I mean, everybody has a hidden side to them, right?”

“First time I heard of that! But, knowing Jirou...”

“...Then, wanna check?”

“...Eh?”

“I mean, you can lift the blanket and check it for yourself. That way you’ll understand.”

“~~~! N-No, I’m not really...”

"I see, can't be helped then. Could you just leave the infirmary for a second?"

"Eh? Why?"

"So that I can put on my pants and underwear! Or, do you want to watch me change in real time!?"

"I-I get it already, I'll be out immediately!"

"Hurry up! If not, I'll show you something big! It'll be like you're taking a tour through the safari, you know that right!?"

"Waaaaaaaah I'm sorry I'm sorry!"

She started apologizing for some reason, and dashed out of the infirmary. Her sounds grew more and more distant. I bet the fear was getting the better of her, not letting her legs stop.

"...Jesus."

I did great, didn't I. I feel like I lost something important in the process though...

"Good work, Jirou-kun." Suzutsuki appeared from beneath the blanket, a blank expression on her face.

She's so calm after making me suffer like that...

"Good for you, right. You made it out alive."

"You're not wrong, but still..."

Being killed right then and there would not have been a good joke at all...Wait hold on. Why did her tone of voice sound off right there?

"Ah, that reminds me, my hiccups seem to have stopped as well. Maybe it's because I held my breath for a while so that we don't get found out."

"Wha..."

Y-You...it was that easy? So nonchalantly...!? Oh yeah, I stopped

hearing her hiccups midway there, but to think it stopped entirely.

“Anyway, let’s call back Subaru. She’ll be happy to learn that my hiccups stopped.”

“Urk.”

I don’t even know what kind of face to make when meeting her. Maybe she’ll believe me if I said that I got possessed by some old man that died seven years ago. I feel like I might have gone away with that.

“...Hm?”

No, hold on. No matter how you look at it, that was way too convenient. Her hiccups seriously stopped right then and there? Those hiccups were supposed to be her only weakness, and yet... That’s almost like she stopped them as soon as they weren’t needed anymore...

“.....”

Right there, a certain hypothesis popped up in my head. It was weird from the beginning. What did we come here for? She talked about trying to stop her hiccups, and yet we didn’t try anything. And yet, what did she do...

“...Suzutsuki, are you serious?”

Was that—all just acting so the two of us could be alone? I mean, all she did was ask me questions. And in the classroom she also said...

‘I rarely get any chances to talk with you alone like this.’

“.....”

So basically, this was all just a means to create another chance to do so. So, this whole ‘Hic!’ part was just her nonsense. But, with how she panicked in the classroom, maybe it was actually the truth in the beginning, but stopped right away...No no no, maybe her panicking was part of the act...Or, everything just lined up perfectly and the hiccups stopped immediately...

“What’s wrong, Jirou-kun?” Seeing me baffled, Suzutsuki asked me this question.

It felt like she was grinning at me.

“.....”

Yeah, no, nevermind. Needlessly thinking about it won’t do me any good. Only that rich lady knows if all this ‘Hic’-ing was true or not. Not to mention, I don’t have anything to gain from figuring it out. That plan had way too many holes in it anyway, like the fact that Konoe suddenly came back, or that someone else might have walked in on us. But, she should have known about this. Think about it, what was the real reason she might have done this, what was the first thing she said today?

—‘Jirou-kun, don’t you think extracurricular classes are quite boring?’

Basically, everything today...

“...Was it just to ease your boredom?” I called out to her after arriving at this single conclusion.

In response, Suzutsuki let out an adorable snicker.

“Jirou-kun, let me tell you one thing.” She said, and stuck out her tongue, flashing a teasing grin. “Girls have a lot of secrets, hic.”



¹ A quote from Frieza in DBZ

Chapter 2: Happy Birthday My Sister

I personally love summer break. I know this makes me sound like some grade school brat or an exhausted salary man, but I'm pretty sure you'd have more trouble finding someone who actively dislikes summer break. Especially when interviewing fellow high school students like me.

After all, there's barely any work to do during summer break. Of course, the reason I say 'barely' is because extracurricular classes exist, but they finally come to an end today as well. I mean, think about it. With no reason to attend school anymore, I don't need to wake up early, thus meaning that she, Sakamachi Kureha, won't come to wake me up.

On top of having talent for close-range combat and gifted with reflexes and athletic abilities, after being taught everything by my Mom, she constantly uses me as a punching bag, which has continued for a solid ten years now. Other young girls are gifted dolls to play with, so it must be something similar in this contest, I'm sure. She just sees me as a toy. Thanks to that, my body turned pretty tough and sturdy.

And this brings me to my main point. The reason I personally love summer break so much is simply because Kureha won't have to wake me up. This is very crucial. Just to let you know, but her way of waking me up isn't some romantic and gentle way by any means. Instead, she does not hold back at all with absolute demonic domestic violence, solely to make sure I don't end up late for the first period. Of course, each time training one of her wrestling moves. With her appearance every morning, my consciousness is forcefully dragged out from the world of my dreams, being thrown into harsh reality and unfair society. However, summer break is different.

Summer break mornings happen with no Kureha. With no classes, she has no reason to wake me up. That's why I end up staying up late, it's

a bad habit of mine. There's just so many good things to watch at night, so I lose sight of the time. However, there's no reason to worry now. When summer break arrives, the alarms in the Sakamachi Family are on break all the same. My sleep is not being limited, and I can relax as much as I want.

Today is the 28th of August. There's not much left of it, and yet this summer break will leave me with great joy for its small amount left. As expected, I was staying up late a whole lot, and when I looked at the time, it had already passed 6am. The outside sky was starting to light up. If I went to bed now, I'd probably wake up at around 2pm for sure. Mm, just perfect. I have plans to go out in the evening, I can relax until then.

Ahh, such peace, such tranquility. And this is what this is all about. I better give my gratitude to another wonderful listless day—

“Guuuuuten morgeeeeen! Mornings, Nii-san!”

The door shot open, and with an energetic scream, cold reality came to slap me in the face...Now hold on. Am I that tired that I'm seeing weird hallucinations? Maybe my eyes have gone crazy on me. But, this sure is a vivid hallucination. She sure resembles Kureha a lot. Look at that white t-shirt. And that smile that looks exactly like Kureha's. Even her hair is the same. Wait, what is she doing...She's using my studying desk as a stepping board and leaping at me!?”

“!”

She soared through the sky. At the same time, I started praying. After all, she acted exactly like my blood-related little sister...This beautiful skill making me feel like I was about to be executed in middle-age Europe...

“Guha!?”

A guillotine drop. Kureha's soft tights slammed right down onto my neck. Not to mention that it was diving-style, almost crushing my windpipe. It was an awe-inspiring attack to the point where I couldn't even react.

“.....”

Now hold on, why am I being tortured with wrestling moves even on a summer break morning like this?

“Nyahaha.”

After pulling off the guillotine drop, Kureha let out a healthy laugh, and got up from me.

“Morning, Nii-san! What a calming morning we’re having!”

Did she drink tequila or something? How in the world is this supposed to be calming? You’re even more excited than usual, oi.

“...Do you even know what time it is?”

“Um..half past 6 in the morning?”

“Correct. So, why did you barge into my room this early?”

“Ehehe, sorry, Nii-san. I just wanted to meet you as quickly as possible...So I came over~”

Wah, her innocent smile is somehow pissing me off. Don’t you underestimate me, you won’t win me over with just a smile.

“Oh yeah, why are you even wearing that?”

“Ah, this?” Kureha pulled on her loose Y t-shirt. That’s mine, isn’t it. Or rather, it’s an old one of mine which didn’t fit me anymore.

“Looks good, right? It might be too small for you, but it fits me perfectly.”

“It just looks like the shirt is wearing you.”

“It even still smells of Nii-san a bit.”

“Feel like that’s fabric conditioner more than anything.”

“Nyahaha, what’s it matter? At least I’m using it.” Kureha twirled around on the spot, showing off the shirt.

Stop that, I can see your panties, alright. After all, she's only wearing that shirt, with some short skirt beneath that. Naturally, her thighs flashing up here and there did not make my heart race. I'd be reaching a Dead End if I felt any kind of lust towards my little sister.

"Hm? Nii-san, were you expecting some panty-flashing?"

"Where did that come from? I'm used to seeing your underwear. Also, just let me sleep, or make me sleep, one of these two."

I'm not even asking for much anymore. I wouldn't mind being choked out to fall asleep unnaturally.

"Ehehe, not happening."

However, Kureha smiled, and denied my hopes and dreams.

"Since it's summer break right now, the two of us should play together some."

"....."

That moment, I was assaulted by fear and terror, thinking that I might have woken up in hell. Play together. The two of us...I'm scared. Playing together with Kureha equals nothing short of a death sentence in my eyes. I might have to leave behind a testament while I still can.

In kindergarten, when we played together, it was always a 'Inoki vs Hulk Hogan' roleplay. Of course, Anton*o Inoki would go down immediately. And surprising nobody, I was Inoki, and Kureha played Hogan. The children who watched us play that were shocked, and the owner of the kindergarten said something along the lines of 'If that girl was born 80 years earlier, she might have changed that war'. You're being just as crazy as Kureha, okay.

"Don't make such a bothered face, I went out of my way to get up early, so let's have some fun!"

"You forced me to be up early, so don't give me that."

"Come on, let's play~"

You ignoring me now? And yes, she did. She approached me like a stray cat, purring audibly. Of course, she's not cute in the slightest. Cat might be cat, but she's more of a lion or tiger than anything. Any sort of blood-thirsty beast. If I'm not careful, she'll bite my head off.

"Alright, I get it. However, the full day is too much. I have some business in the evening, so if it's until then, I'll play with you."

I gave in fairly easily. I know I have no backbone, but it's better than having all my bones broken. If she ends up pissed off for good, I'll end up like a watermelon after the watermelon splitting game. Ahh, farewell to my summer holiday...

"Yaay! Love you, Nii-san!"

"Don't say that so lightly. Also, keep the playing to a healthy way. I am not going to be your punching bag for the rest of the day."

"Nyahaha, rest assured. I actually got this thing right here yesterday." She spoke with a bragging tone, and showed me a plastic case of sorts.

"Let's play a fighting game, Nii-san!"

"Fighting game..."

A fighting game, huh...Ahh, so nostalgic. That's right, when it wasn't about wrestling, we always played fighting games. Though the times went down in number after we started attending high school.

"...Heh, fine by me, my little sister. I'll make you regret that you challenged me." I responded while turning on the TV.

I actually like fighting games a lot. If I get beat up, it at least happens in the game, and not in reality, so I don't feel any pain.

"Oh yeah, what franchise? KOF¹? Guilty?"

"Nope. It's a self-made game not on the market. But, it works on the same hardware."

"..."

Hey now. Isn't that pretty bad? Normally those games don't work on public hardwares, right? Is this some legal action brewing up?

"Hey, who did you get this from? Do I know them?"

I mean, I have one person in mind, but I don't want to think about the chances of them being it. Whenever that woman is involved, nothing good will happen after all...However.

"I actually got it from Onee-sama." Kureha nonchalantly declared the scenario I had feared the most, and named the person that shall not be named.

...This is the worst. There's only person Kureha would refer to with Onee-sama—Suzutsuki Kanade. She's my classmate, as well as a pure-breed rich lady. And despite that, she's a cold-blooded monster. She's a vampire, sucking out the blood out of my nose whenever she pleases.

"I'm surprised she created a game like this."

"She didn't. At our school, we have the game research club, right."

"Game research club?"

"The people who know a lot about computers. Onee-sama offered them a large sum of money, and they made this."

"Huh~"

Wait, weren't the members of that club supposed to be pretty difficult to deal with? I heard stories of them going '3D sucks! 2D FTW!' and so on. They even put that on posters and whatever.

"I heard about some crazy negotiations or something."

"Seriously?"

"When Onee-sama went to the club, she said something like 'I know someone who can completely flatten all the data on your laptops', you know."

“Yeah, well, that’s not a negotiation if you ask me.”

“It’s important to ask people for stuff with a smile.”

“Be careful, my little sister. Her smile is filled with only bad intentions.”

Makes sense that the negotiations worked out, she was threatening them with a nuclear missile, ruining all of their hard work. Almost like the leader of a nation threatening war with another country.

“But, that’s a rare thing, alright. To think that rich lady would show her true personality to the average student...”

Normally, Suzutsuki would always try to act like an absolute honor student, or in other words, a wolf wearing sheep’s clothing. I can’t imagine her ruining her image like that...

“That’s why she apparently prepared a follow-up from the very beginning, or something like that.”

“Follow-up?”

“After the negotiations were complete, and she was about to leave the room, she said ‘I-It’s not like I wanted to rely on you for this or anything...!’ as she blushed.”

“.....”

“Then the guys said ‘You are an angel blessing this boring 3D world!’, and offered their entire beings.”

“Whip and candy, huh...!”

That’s Suzutsuki Kanade for you. She really knows where to hit. No wonder these guys were entranced in a heartbeat.

“Anyway, let’s start playing, Nii-san. I’m looking forward to this fighting game~” Kureha energetically sat down in front of the TV, setting up the game.

I sighed to myself, but grabbed the controller, and sat down next to

her. I'm trying to be a good older brother here. When I was thinking about that, some words appeared on the screen.

'Rouran Academy Battle War'

Together with that, some cheap-sounding BGM started playing, making me feel like I was watching a B movie.

"Um... 'Story Mode' and 'VS Mode' are our only choices, huh." Kureha took out a small piece of paper.

It seemed to be the manual. Why is that handwritten? Odd.

"I guess VS Mode for us then?" Kureha fidgeted with the controller to choose this option, to which the screen switched to the character selection menu.

Now, what characters did they add...

"...Huh? There's only four characters."

"Yeah, that's the most they could do for now. Apparently it's just Nii-san and me, Onee-sama and Konoe-senpai, but you can play as Usamin-senpai and NaruNaru if you clear the story mode."

"Hmmm."

...Wait, hold on. Am I hearing things correctly? What was that about the characters being us? I looked over at the screen. There, I spotted a handsome young man with a bright hair color, a beauty with rich lady vibes and long black hair, a young girl with a short haircut, and a guy wearing glasses...

"That's me!?" I pointed at the TV, and retorted. "Why!? How!?"

"According to the manual, they used us six as models for the game."

"Don't say it so blatantly! They used us in their fighting game, you know!"

"What's it matter? Don't you want to use yourself as a fighter?"

“Urk...”

Now that she mentioned it, I often thought how cool it would be if I could use myself as a character to fight. But...you know...

“Kureha, can I ask one thing?”

“Hmmmmm?”

“Why...am I the only one not wearing clothes?”

I looked at the screen one more time. I saw Kureha and the other two, properly wearing Rouran Academy’s uniform, and a single me standing there butt-naked with only glasses on...

“Can’t be helped, it’s you after all.”

“Why!? Let me wear clothes! Why am I the only one different!?”

“A lot of players like characters with that kind of habit, you know?”

“We’re talking about female users!”

“You look like you might let out some lightning strike.”

“I wish I at least had green skin²!”

Dangerous. This is dangerous in a lot of ways. I might have to bring this to court.

“Then, I’ll be using myself. What will you do, Nii-san?”

“I...I’ll just use myself. I’m curious as to how I handle myself.” I operated my controller, and selected myself.

The screen changed again, and now we were selecting the stage to fight on.

“Wahh, there’s so many. Look at that ‘Family Market’ or ‘Seven-Eleven’. I don’t know which to pick.”

“Who cares, there’s really not much to choose from.”

I mean, all the stages are inside supermarkets or convenience markets. I'd hate fighting in a Fama.

"Alright, I picked the stage. I'm not gonna lose!"

"I'm surprised you can be this motivated with such a shitty game. Also, stay away from the screen, or you'll ruin your eyes."

"Okay-smokey!" Kureha smiled innocently.

It really is hard to imagine she would knock me out every morning. Right now, she's just a normal girl. If she doesn't act like Hulk Hogan every day, she might actually be a bit cute.

"Ah, it started."

It finished loading, and the screen switched to the battle stage. It seems to be a 2D fighting game, showing a naked high school boy with only a pair of underwear and a high school girl facing each other in a convenience market.

'I'll make you break with crack!'

Ohhh! The Kureha in the game said that. I mean, it's not her actual voice, but it's pretty similar. I guess this is more of a classic fighting game where characters taunt the other player. I wonder what I will say...

'You wench! Don't you dare wear clothes in front of me!'

Who!? Why!? Why am I screaming that at my own little sister in the middle of a convenience store? Not to mention that I'm not wearing any clothes myself! If this was real, I'd have gotten arrested by now.

'Round 1: Fight!'

With a mechanical voice announcing this, the battle began. Wah, it started. Um...so this button is kicking, and this is punching. I tried out the various buttons, and got a feel for the combat. Since I don't hold any tools on me, I must be a close-range type. But, everytime I used any ability, I would scream stupid stuff like 'Cat ears and kneesocks are culture!' or 'Glasses with garter belts are my reason for

existing!', which I really wish they would patch out of the game, alright.

"Nya, it seems like I'm the throwing-type of character."

Unlike me, Kureha could only activate skills at a close range. Isn't that fairly accurate, huh. She would say things like 'Out of the way, Nii-san! I can't kill them like this!' or 'Sakura isn't a monster!', leaving me confused where they stole those phrases from.

"Nii-san, don't run away!"

"Don't joke with me. Who'd get closer to a throwing-type."

My fighting mentality is a pathetic hit & run. It might not look as cool in the game, but it allows me to win, so I'm not gonna hold back. On the screen, you could see me with only my underwear being chased by Kureha, a rather surreal situation indeed. While running away, I would sometimes fight back to chip away Kureha's HP, and sometimes throw in a big attack to seal the deal. This is it, this style is most fit for me. Heh, the me in this game isn't half bad! If only I was wearing proper clothes, it would be perfect!

'Oraah!'

Together with a scream in game, filled with my own energy, I attack Kureha. It looked surreal enough, with me wearing basically nothing, but I used a certain-kill technique nonetheless.

"Ahh...I lost."

The Kureha in the game collapsed to the ground, and the Kureha next to me groaned. Oh crap, what is this feeling of superiority right now. In reality, I'm always being beaten to a pulp, but now I actually defeated Kureha. Ahh, I might just start crying...

"Not yet, Nii-san! You have to defeat me in both rounds to win!"

"Fight's on! I'll show you my true (2D) strength!"

The two of us got completely hooked on it. Oh yeah, that attack I just used sure was cool. I wonder what that was.

“Kureha, how do you check a character’s move set? I just did it out of luck just now, so I wanna know how to do it consistently.”

“Ah, I was thinking that as well. But, there’s no move list here in this manual. It seems like you can only stop the game mid-battle and check it that way.”

“I see. Then, you check it first, it’s the privilege of a loser.”

“Hmpf, I’ll be winning next!”

There, right as the second round began, Kureha paused the game. It immediately switched to Kureha’s move setlist. From what I can see, she doesn’t have that many moves, which you would expect from a throwing-type character...

“Let’s see...drop kick, death valley bomb, and a backwards throw, cobra twist...and my certain-kill technique is the ‘Avalanche-style Brain Buster’, huh.”

They were all proper wrestling moves. Of course, I experienced all of them myself, in reality.

“Then, next up will be me.”

Kureha swiftly continued the game, to which I pressed the pause button on my controller. Now it should show my own moves. I ran through them with my eyes, and...

“‘Laying off’, ‘Debt’, ‘Public park’, ‘Family breakup’, ‘Goodbye, my beloved family!’...?”

The hell are these moves!? I screamed out loud, and slammed my controller into the ground.

“Ahahaha, that’s Onee-sama for you, she really understands Nii-san.”

“How!? This is just weird! Why are my moves making me sound like a salary man who gave up on life!”

“That’s...well, it can’t be helped.”

“Why do you look at me with such a condescending gaze!?”

“Nii-san, no matter how depressing your future may be, you need to move forward no matter what.”

“Why are you cheering me on now!?”

“You can’t run...you can’t run...you can’t run...”

“Don’t repeat it over and over!”

They’ll make an anime out of this! No, calm down. The problem here are the names of my moves. Why is my certain-kill technique called ‘Goodbye, my beloved family!’, huh!? That’s just depressing. Don’t give up, me. Move forward. There’s good things about life that you have yet to find!

“Hey, let’s change characters.”

“Ehh? We’re still on round 2, you know? Running away?”

“Not exactly. I’m just feeling anxious seeing my character in the game.”

I ignored Kureha’s protest, and forcefully quit back to the character selection menu. I should have known that Suzutsuki would make fun of me in a game made by herself.

“Not fair~ Misuse of power and position!”

“Don’t sulk like that. You can use Konoe in the next battle then.”

“Eh? Really? That means he’ll be my exclusive use.”

“.....”

Exclusive use, huh. She’s as charmed by Konoe as always.

“So you’ll use Onee-sama, Nii-san?”

“I was thinking about it, yeah.”

I’m terrified that I might get cursed if I actually used her though. We

finished picking characters and the stage, and the screen changed to the battle stage, showing Konoe in her male butler uniform, and Suzutsuki, facing each other.

‘Dear master, order me whatever you please.’

Hmm, that’s Subaru-sama for you. She’s cool even inside the game. Not to mention that this is exactly what she would say in reality as well. And, as for Suzutsuki...

‘—Let me show you what a real battle is like.’

...Yup, scary. She definitely is on a different scale.

‘Round 1, fight!’

The battle started. Alright, better go confirm Suzutsuki’s attack moves...I pressed some random buttons on my controller—when the screen suddenly turned white.

“What is happening? Did you do something, Nii-san?”

“Eh? No, not really...”

Maybe the game is bugged? The screen was still white. I figured that maybe I should reset the console once, when the flashing light suddenly disappeared, and we returned to the fighting screen. However...

“Huh!? My Konoe-senpai lost!?”

When the screen turned back to normal, Kureha let out a baffled voice. Konoe had collapsed on the screen, her HP being 0. Also, hold on. Why did the convenience store stage turn into a burned-up plain. On top of that, Suzutsuki’s face was refreshed and confident.

“Let me check the commands first. I feel like I used some weird move.”

Right as round 2 started, I pressed the pause button. I didn’t use a certain-kill technique, right? Terrified, I found only one word there...

‘Nuclear Weapon’

“Hold on a damn second!” I threw in a retort. “Suzutsuki! Why do you only have a nuclear weapon as a skill! And it’s not even a final attack move!? You’re ruining the game balance!”

“C-Calm down, Nii-san.”

“Don’t stop me, Kureha! I’m not letting you silence me!”

“You’re complaining about the Onee-sama inside the game, you know!?”

“Urk...! B-But, she used a nuclear weapon inside a convenience store, you know!”

“You made her do it though?”

“How am I supposed to know that a single button press would kill millions like that!?”

Devil Suzutsuki is no joke, seriously. I feel like this is the first time I ever saw a character in a fighting game use a nuclear weapon as a move.

“I bet that Onee-sama is the last boss of this game. That’s why she alone is that strong.”

“Either way, using her is forbidden from now on.”

Nobody can defeat her. Her attack is something you can’t even defend against. Not to mention that she’s playable from the start.

“Then I’ll continue using Konoe-senpai. How about you fight with yourself, Nii-san?”

“Ehhh?”

“What’s it matter? Besides the appearance and attack names, you’re totally normal. Or, do you want to see me fight Konoe-senpai instead?”

“Alright, alright, I get it, so don’t glare at me like that.” Kureha’s sharp gaze pierced my body.

It seems like she hates the idea of fighting the guy she has the hots for, even in just a game. I really don’t understand girls. Then again, I never grasped what exactly Kureha was thinking. Either way, it was decided that I would be fighting with myself, and Kureha once again went with Konoe.

That’s a match-up and a half, alright. Konoe was quite balanced, promising a thrilling fight with every round...Or so it should have been, but...

“Urk, I lost again...” Kureha grit her teeth in frustration.

That’s right, I don’t really know why, but even as it turned into a close battle, I would always come out on top. We’re both the close-range type of fighter, so it shouldn’t show that much of a difference...

“How about you use your brain a bit more?” Kureha was basically playing with her face glued to the screen.

Because of that, she lost the bigger picture. Not to mention that her moves are so easy to read. Ah see, she activated another counter again.

“I mean, even if it’s in a game, there’s no way Konoe-senpai would lose against Nii-san...”

Ahh, I see. So that’s the reason she’s so passionate about...Wait hold on.

“K-Kureha-san?”

If my eyes weren’t playing tricks on me, then I was indeed seeing my little sister crying.

“Unya...In reality, Konoe-senpai would definitely win. Maybe it’s because I’m not worthy enough of Konoe-senpai’s strength...!”

Ah, crap. She’s crying for real now. Come on, who was the bastard who made a girl cry? Ah, me, right. This is bad. Kureha really hates

losing, doesn't she. According to my experience, if I don't let up now, I won't have any more ground to stay alive.

"A-Ah, I've grown tired of playing as myself. Maybe I should switch to a different cha—"

Crack, it sounded like something was getting close to breaking. Looking over, I saw fissures on Kureha's controller, like an elephant had stepped on it.

"Huuuuuuuh...Nii-san, you're running away with your victory?" I heard a cold warning next to me.

My little sister showed a forced smile, as the controller in her hands started raising screams of terror and agony. Alright, guess I have to hold back. I have to make sure that she doesn't realize though. I'm trying to be a good brother after all, so as long as I can make her win, and happy...

"Just to let you know, but this is a serious battle. If you were to hold back against me..."

More cracking sounds followed...Gaaah, the controller! It's slowly turning into dust!

"Ah, it broke."

"No no no no! You broke it!"

"Nyahaha, not quite, Nii-san. It must have been broken from the start."

"Broken from the start..."

"After all, that thing couldn't handle a bit of an endurance test like this." Kureha said, and threw the broken controller into the burnable trash bin in my room, and connected a new controller to the console.

...Anyone, help me. At this rate, I'm dead meat, and it'll be by the hands of my own sister.

"Next. We're going again, Nii-san. This time, me and Konoe-senpai

will win!” A determined gaze came from Kureha’s eyes.

Problematic about this however is that the more passionate she gets, the easier it becomes to read her movement. It’s a devilish downward spiral. And, since I’m not allowed to hold back, it becomes much easier for me to win.

“.....”

Before I realized it, it was 42 wins and 0 loses for me. The difference between us was overwhelming. If this was a baseball match, it’d be a called game, and if this was a round of boxing, her coach would have thrown the towel by now. Talking about soccer, the angry fans would have probably stormed the field by now. Naturally, Kureha’s anger meter was reaching critical levels.

“...Um, Kureha-san?” Terrified, I called out to my little sister.

I mean, she suddenly got all quiet, you know. Because she was looking at the ground, I couldn’t see her reaction too well, but her small body was shaking...

“Nii-san, you dummyyyyyyyyyy!!”

As expected, she exploded like a volcano erupting.

“...Alright.”

I can still make it in time. If I leave behind a testament now, I can make it. Umm...for starters: ‘My, Sakamachi Kinjirou’s life is in danger. I do not know why someone would aim for me. All I can tell you is that it is related to Oyashiro-sama’s curse³...’. No, better not. That sounds like it would be straight out of some visual novel.

“C-Calm down, Kureha. This is just a game, nothing more.” I tried to calmly reason with her so as to not get her more worked up.

“Dummy! Nii-san, you dummy!”

“Why are you acting like a child now.”

“Who’s a child!? You got all serious even though it’s just a game!”

“You told me not to go easy on you, right!?”

“Urk...I-I can't help it! I didn't think I would lose this much!”

She must have felt that a lot of the blame was with her, as her anger subsided much more quickly than I had imagined. Thank god, at least I managed to avoid the worst-case scenario. Man, she sure has grown up a lot...Wait hold on. Why does she look like she's about to cry yet again?

“Uuuu...Nii-san, you dummy...” Large tears came streaming out from her eyes, as she pouted.

How could this happen? Second calamity occurred. But, why? Is there really a need to go this far just because she lost in a game?

“So cruel...I wanted to have fun at least for today, so...”

“At least for today?”

The heck is up with that? Is that why she's so full of energy the second she woke me up?

“B-Because it didn't work out last year, I wanted to make up for it this year...!” Kureha explained while sniffing.

...This year? And it didn't work out last year...does she mean?

“Kureha, did you want to play with me today because it's your birthday?” Hearing my words, Kureha twitched once, and stopped moving.

That's right, today is the 28th of August, and also the 16th birthday of my little sister Sakamachi Kureha.

“S-So what about it! Last year, you forgot about my birthday and went out to play with Kurose-senpai, didn't you! I didn't even get a present!”

Yup, she's right. Kurose told me he got concert tickets for a band I'm a big fan of, so I ignored my little sister's birthday to go there. I really regretted that a lot later on, you know.

“That’s why I decided we’d play all day long! I even used the birthday present I got from Onee-sama...!”

Ahh, I see. That’s why Suzutsuki went out of her way to make this.

“I even got a Silent Sheep plush toy from Konoe-senpai as a birthday present. Yet, my own older brother forgot about my birthday!”

Well, I can’t blame her for crying like that. We always treasured these kinds of events in our family. Mom loved birthday parties and all that, so each year was noisy. But this year, Mom isn’t home, as she’s out overseas for the past half a year. That’s why she must have been worried that her older brother forgot.

“.....”

This moron. Why are you acting like this? You’re ruining the big surprise I prepared.

“...Nii-san?”

Seeing me suddenly get up, Kureha gave me a dubious gaze. I slowly headed towards the closet in the corner of my room, all to show her what was inside.

“Kureha.”

Calling out her name, I took out a large plastic box, decorated with a red ribbon, from inside the closet.

“N-Nii-san, is that...”

“Yup, it sure is.”

I actually prepared this around a month ago, to ensure that I didn’t commit the same mistake as last year, and so that she would be happy.

“I actually planned on getting the cake I ordered later, but you just had to ruin my plans.” I hid my embarrassment with a complaint, and offered the large box to Kureha.

And then, I said the words I had prepared for an entire year.

“—Happy birthday, Kureha.”

Happy Birthday my sister. I hope you like your present.

♀ × ♂

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!?” A shout pierced my ears.

Some switch must have flipped, because Kureha carried my present on her shoulders like some WWE belt, and screamed even further.

“Nii-san Nii-san Nii-san...!”

“...What?”

“—Thanks so much!” She smiled like a blooming sunflower.

She’s as honest and direct with her feelings, huh.

“Can I open it up?”

She embraced the box, and looked at me with a tilted head.

“Yeah. Go ham.”

“Okay!” Kureha nodded, and tore off the wrapping paper like a cat scratching its claws at a cat tree.

After everything was removed, and the box thrown to the side, what appeared was—

“Waaaaah, such a large plush toy! It’s a white puppy, right!”

“.....”

Sorry, Kureha, that’s actually a bear. It was a white bear about half the size of me. Seeing its reckless face and stature, I figured it would be the perfect punching bag for Kureha. It cost me a lot of my allowance to hire this newcomer, but it was worth it. As long as she liked her present, everything was worth it.

“Yaaay! Thanks! Thanks so much, Nii-san!”



Full of joy, Kureha held hands, as she danced through the house with her new friend at hand. It truly is a heartwarming sight.

“I’m glad you like it.”

I guess I can call this year’s birthday a success, disregarding the many

ups and downs. Happy birthday, truly. I think I somehow managed to act like a proper older brother this year—

“——Heh.”

There, I grinned. All according to keikaku. Man, I was panicking like crazy when she suddenly talked about playing together, but I'm glad things ended fairly smoothly. Indeed, everything I had planned today was in order to avoid the tragedy that had occurred exactly one year ago—The 8.28 Accident.

Just as Kureha stated, I completely forgot about her birthday back then. But in order for you to get my point, I need to explain one simple yet important thing...I don't remember anything. Nothing at all. From the night of the 28th to the dawn of the 29th, I don't remember anything at all. It's like all my memories of that single day were removed entirely. All I remember is that I came home after the concert, and was greeted by a demon— Kureha—the second I entered the front entrance. After that, it's a blank slate.

When I woke up, I was laying on my bed, only wearing a single pair of trunks. Time and memories had vanished. All I was left with was the pain inflicted on my entire body, and my legends quivering in an unknown fear, like I was a freshly-born lamb. And if that wasn't enough, when I confirmed my appearance in the large mirror inside my room, I was forced to scream in terror.

—Nii-san, you dummy.

These words were written on my body with a red pen, with me wearing nothing but a pair of underwear looking at it in shock. My entire body was covered in these words. Luckily, she held back from writing anything inside my underwear, but the fear had already filled my body. And, the words Kureha said had yet to leave my head once.

‘Um...Sorry, Nii-san. I went too far yesterday.’

Let me declare this right now, that was the last time Kureha ever acknowledged she went too far in all these years of us living together. Not even waking me up like that every single day had her show me that kind of reaction. And yet, now she apologized. Will you

understand what kind of catastrophic event this has been? The second I understood the tragedy that had happened, I stopped thinking, and ignored any kind of memories I still had. And then, I swore to myself, namely that I would not commit the same mistake ever again. This is the summary of the 8.28 Incident.

“...Haaa.”

I finished my personal flashback, and sighed in relief. Because of the high cost of her present, I'll have to live a poor man's life for the next month, but it was all worth it in the end. She's happy about her present, and I'm safe and healthy.

“Ehehe, thanks a lot, Nii-san.” Kureha smiled, while tightly embracing her plush toy.

It seems like she sure has taken a liking to it. Well, I guess it's thanks to everything working out smoothly. Honestly speaking, it's even grossing me out a bit at how everything worked out so smoothly.

“I'm feeling very happy today. Onee-sama, Konoe-senpai, and now Nii-san, you all gave me wonderful presents today. This is the best birthday ever, I think.”

“Glad to hear that.”

“But...I feel too happy...” Kureha started blushing ever so slightly. “I suddenly feel like...being spoiled by Nii-san a bit.”

“.....”

Now hold on, what is she saying? And why does it sound like I walked into some horror movie?

“Nyahaha.” Kureha showed a bashful smile.

While fidgeting nervously, she approached me. Her eyes were staring at me, almost like she had set her eyes on her prey...

“...Ah.”

I forgot. How could I forget? Why is she waking me up with a

wrestling move every morning? Why does she want to train with me? It's all...her own way of showing affection. Just like a kitty would gently scratch your leg when asking for food, she sees this as innocent skinship. However, with how much power she has, it's not just a bit of playful joking.

“Hey...Onii-chan...”

That's a nostalgic tone. That's how she would approach me back in grade school when she wanted attention from me. Ahh, I can already see the upcoming development...

“Can I...get a hug?”

Why not do that with the plush toy you literally just got? I desperately wanted to utter these words out loud, but Kureha already grasped my body from the front, and tightly hugged me. In wrestling terms, this is what you would call a bear hug. And it was one full of a little sister's feelings towards her older brother.

“Nigyaaaaaaaaah!”

Even though the soft shirt, I could feel her soft body, directly pressing onto me...inside my head, three different points popped up in my head, going from ‘What to reflect on today’, ‘Ambition of the future’ and finally ‘Current state of mind’.

1: This is my fault for not considering my little sister's personality.

2: I won't commit the same mistake next year.

3: Well, one bear hug isn't as bad. I'll just pass out once.

I felt my consciousness slowly growing more distant. Of course, my little sister was to be blamed without a doubt for activating my gynophobia like this, but I'll ignore that for today. After all, it's her birthday, so I'll spoil her at least that much. After all, I'm the oldest son of the Sakamachi Family, and her older brother. I need to show off at times.

“Ehehehe, Nii-san—I love you~”

Together with the sound of my bones breaking, I felt like I heard my little sister's sweet whisper, but my consciousness already left me behind.

1 King of Fighters

2 I have no idea. DBZ? Don't ask me

3 A reference to the Higurashi no Naku Koro Ni series

Chapter 3: Advice Picnic

“Senpai, you seem to be short on money, right.”

It was the 29th of August, roughly at noon. I stood in the kitchen to prepare lunch, when the doorbell rang. Upon opening the door, I was greeted by these words. On top of that, I saw cat ears. Cat ears with glasses. This appearance, unfitting in this residential area, stuck out to me first thing, together with a healthy tanned body, covered by a laced one-piece clothing. Can't ignore the well-endowed chest sticking into my eyes too—Indeed, I was looking at Narumi Nakuru.

The glasses junkie gave me an innocent smile the second I opened the door...Now then, what should I do about this?

“...Ah, hey! Stop! Stop right there!”

After thinking for about three seconds, I decided to close the door on the girl's nose, but she used her hands to stop me in doing so. Now that's a smooth reaction alright.

“Senpai! Why are you being so cruel to Nakuru?!”

“Let go with that hand, I will call the police.”

“Why are you treating Nakuru like a thief!?”

“The hell are you talking about, you're a pervert, and a deviant.”

“You treat Nakuru like a monster!? Grrr...now that's come to this! Ahhh, save Nakuru! She's being abducteeeee!”

“Ah, hey stop that!”

“Noooo! Your hand! Your hand is touching Nakuru's cheeks!”

“...! Alright, I get it! I get it, so stop shouting!”

Seeing no other choice, I opened the door. Seriously, this girl is no

joke. This is the residential district, I have to be afraid of our neighbours calling the police on me.

“You’re so cruel, treating a girl like a suspicious person.”

“Don’t say that while wearing cat ears, alright.”

“Eh? Are you saying that Nakuru’s fashion is odd?”

“Put one hand on your chest, and think about it yourself.”

“Put one hand on Nakuru’s...Eeeek! You’re so lewd, Senpai. You’re violating Nakuru with your words!”

“Do I really seem like I have the guts to throw in these implications?”

Also, don’t actually fondle your breasts, they’re too large for that!

“So what do you want? Some business with Kureha?”

That’s about the only reason I can think of why she would be here. However, Kureha ain’t even home right now. She just left with a puzzling ‘I’m going to get myself hungry by jogging for a while!’, and that’s it. Craziest thing is that it makes perfect sense for me.

“No, Nakuru didn’t come here to meet Kureha-chan. In fact, she told me about your dire financial situation via a previous email.”

“What the hell are you two even talking about?”

“Nakuru and Kureha-chan are best friends. Nakuru actually came to visit her several times already.”

“Really?”

I had no idea. Also, I actually didn’t want to either. To think this glasses junkie had free reign in my own home. Maybe I should put on some ‘Stray dog around!’ warning. There’s no stray dog, but my little sister is close enough, I guess.

“Still, you’re living in a great home.”

“Why’d you throw praise at me now?”

“Your room also feels so fresh and alive, it’s quite comfortable.”

“.....”

...Am I mishearing things? I feel like I just heard something I most definitely can’t ignore.

“Your bed sure is comfortable and fluffy, Senpai.”

“How do you know about how my bed feels!?”

“Eh? That’s...Ehe...”

“Why are you blushing like that!?”

Damn that Kureha, treating my room like some exhibition. But, why would she do that? She wouldn’t just let random people into my room like that...

“Don’t blame Kureha-chan, please. The responsibility lies with Nakuru.”

“Responsibility?”

“Yes. Back then, Nakuru gave Kureha-chan the new Subaru-sama bromide.”

“I call that bribery!”

“It was just a coincidence. Kureha-chan said ‘I need to thank you somehow...’ so it just happened...”

“So why are you using that as an immediate chance to barge into my room!?”

It’s a calculated crime, alright. I’m not part of this fanclub, but Kureha is a passionate Konoe fan. If it’s for her sake, she would surely fight a great white shark. And I have no doubt in my mind that she could win too.

“Fufu, that occasion allowed me to thoroughly enjoy Senpai’s room.”

“Gross, stop it.”

Knowing Nakuru, she probably used that to gather material for her unethical shipping stuff. After all, she loves drawing doujinshi of me and Konoe (as a man) as her hobby. Is that why she came here today?

“So, let me get to the main point, Senpai. Nakuru actually needs advice on something.”

“Advice?”

“That’s right. As Nakuru said just now, you’re a bit short on money, right? Must be hard, with the second-term right around the corner.”

“Well...I guess?”

Since yesterday was Kureha’s birthday, I’m currently on a saving money diet. Not to mention a pretty extreme one. If I was any average human, I would have collapsed by now. Of course, I am getting close to it as well, at least mentally.

“That’s why Nakuru thought of mentioning a certain part-time job.”

“Part-time job?”

“Yes.” Nakuru nodded, and continued. “Nakuru would like you to go on a date with her now.”

As the summer sun shone brightly down on her tanned body, the girl declared thus with a somewhat flustered tone.

♀ × ♂

“The thing is, Nakuru is in a bit of a slump as of late.”

We changed locations, now on our way in the nearby neighbourhood. While walking along next to me, Nakuru muttered with a somewhat regrettable tone.

“Nakuru was working on her new novel, but...she’s not making any progress...”

“Oh yeah, you mentioned something like that during the school

festival.”

“Nakuru’s progress comes in waves. Sometimes she can write a whole lot, and sometimes she can’t write anything at all. And with all this trouble lately...”

“Trouble?”

“Ah, well, some personal circumstances at Nakuru’s family, just ignore that. What’s important right now is that Nakuru needs some sort of trigger to make it out of her slump.”

“Huh.”

So that’s why she went on a date with me. I mean, even if you try to explain it that way, it still doesn’t make any sense. But, Nakuru just ignored all of those doubts, saying ‘Nakuru feels like she might come up with something if Senpai is around’, so there you have it.

“Nakuru called it a date, but eating lunch together is plenty. See, she even made lunch boxes for that sake!” Nakuru put one hand on the adorable bag she was carrying.

Waaah, is this okay? I’m worried she might have some aphrodisiac mixed in there to be honest.

“Let’s do our best. Nakuru doesn’t want to disappoint everyone who is waiting for her next release.”

“Oh yeah, you were the president of the [Watch over Committee].”

The so-called [Watch over Committee] is an abbreviation for the [Watch over Subaru-sama with a warm gaze] committee, which is filled with religious bastards who just love to see some BL action between me and Konoe.

“People actually expect something from Nakuru, of all things.”

“You’re surprisingly humble, I see.”

“But, it is pretty embarrassing. The greeting of the fanclub even has Nakuru’s name.”

“The greeting?”

“It goes ‘3, 2, 1, Nakkuru Nakkuru!’, you know.”

“The hell is that!?”

This sounds more like your fanclub than anything!

“By the way, the Ghib*ⁱ fans called it the ‘Yakkuru Yakkuru¹!’ greeting.”

“I don’t think anybody cares about the greeting at that point.”

“Even so, we’re better off than the others.”

“The others...you mean [S4]?”

“Yes. After all, their current greeting is ‘Slaughter him!’, you know.”

“ ... ”

Slaughter who? Hm? Mind telling me? Actually, I don’t even want to know. I’m sure that their image of me must be at its lowest ever since Konoe’s school broadcast during the school festival. I better be careful that I don’t get stabbed in the back while walking down the hallway.

“Still, Nakuru is surprised you agreed so easily.”

“Hm?”

“For the date. She expected you to say no.” Nakuru seemed relieved, as she gave me her gratitude. “Thank you very much.”

Well, you know. When I look to my side, and see Nakuru gleefully going ‘Meow meow meow~’ with a bright smile as she’s enjoying her date, I just can’t help but think of her as cute. Even if she’s walking down the evil path of drawing BL doujinshi with me as the main actor, she is still a girl. Maybe it’s just me being overly meddlesome or naive, but I want to help a girl who’s in trouble.

Well, there’s also the part of her saying ‘Nakuru will properly pay

you for the date!’, but that most certainly did not make me decide anything. I would not dare rely on such measures just to survive the next few days.

“—Ah, there it is. Nakuru’s plan for today was to have a simple picnic. Let’s eat lunch over there.” Nakuru pointed at a certain location.

...Well, you might call it a picnic, but...

“That’s just a public park.”

Indeed, it was nothing but a tasteless and unrefined public park. No people around, not offering that much size to begin with, and with wild grass everywhere. It was equipped with swings, a slide, and a small sand pit. It really wasn’t anything special, and yet it felt oddly familiar.

“...Ah.”

“Huh? What’s wrong, Senpai? You look like you remembered something awful.”

“...No, it’s nothing.” I muttered, and showed Nakuru a smile.

I remember. This is the park where Kureha and I, still young as brats, would often play at. Ahhhh, all the traumas are coming back. For example, that slide over there, when I was roughly five years old, Kureha rammed into my body with a flying body press, screaming ‘Onii-chan, I love you!’. From my point of perspective, she looked like a missile about to impact. Following that, she’d say ‘Let’s do a buried alive death match!’, and drag me to the sand pit, and...Ahhhhh!

“Alright, let’s get on with the lunch.”

“Hm? Nakuru doesn’t mind, but you sure are motivated all of a sudden.”

“Yeah, I’m trying to stay positive in life after all.”

“Well, you’re not wrong.” Nakuru added, but she still seemed confused.

I'll just store away those awful memories for now. Freeze them beneath the ice in Siberia, that sounds good.

"Ah, there is one important thing Nakuru forgot to mention."

Right as I wanted to set foot into the public park, Nakuru suddenly brought her body closer to mine.

"L-Let's hold hands."

"Huh?" I froze up.

No, hold on a second, Nakuru-san. Even if this is supposed to be a date, we're not even dating, so there's no need to...Aaaaaaaah, she took it without even waiting for my consent!

"Y-You...!"

"D-Don't panic. The mood is very crucial for this, and necessary for Nakuru's work." She said, sounding flustered.



The tension must have gotten the better of her, because Nakuru tightly grasped my hand, which allowed me to feel her warmth. Her palm was much smaller than mine too...

“.....”

Don't tell me...is this the first time she held hands with a boy? So, what if this was her first date...

“.....!”

I don't know why, but this situation is bad. I have my own gynophobia to worry about. And worst of all, Nakuru doesn't even know about that. Just thinking about it had me feel goosebumps all over. If my nose started bleeding now, she'll find out about my phobia...No, calm down, Sakamachi Kinjiro. Stay rational, we won't stay like this for too long, so it'll be fine...

“Hm? Senpai, why is your pulse racing like this?”

“!?”

“Your body temperature went up to 36.5°C as well.”

“How do you know about that?!”

“Fufu, just joking. Nakuru is glad that she isn't the only nervous one here. Her heart is beating faster than usual.” She seemed to be relieved, as she swung her hand up and down while walking on head.

No, not just a bit, okay. My heart is about to go into overheating mode. My red blood cells were racing through my veins like they were playing a racing game.

“Let's sit down here.” Nakuru walked in front of a bench standing in the shadow of a big tree, and let go of my hand.

...That was dangerous. I didn't think it would come to this. This is almost like what happened with Masamune during the school festival.

“Have a seat, Senpai. Nakuru put everything into this lunch.” She said, and took out a lunch box from her bag...Correction, a two-layer lunch box, and opened it up on the bench.

One side was full with grilled chicken, rolled omelettes, potato salad, and some adorable octopus-shaped wieners. The other side contained rice balls...Mm, looks delicious.

“Now, eat up.”

“...Yeah.”

Although a bit hesitant, I sat down on the bench, on the other side of the lunch box.

“Then, I’m digging in?” I accepted the chopsticks, and carefully approached the lunch with them.

Don’t blame me, meeting a woman who can cook is a rarity for me. Of course, Masamune is an exception, but she has to carefully pick what to even cook because of her financial situation. And this time it’s Narumi Nakuru of all people. I wouldn’t be surprised if she put something into her cooking.

“Hm? What’s wrong? Hurry and eat up...Or are you hoping for a template ‘Open wide~’ event?”

Not even knowing what I was feeling, Nakuru picked up some food with her own chopsticks, and pushed it towards me while saying ‘Open wide~’...Yeah, I think this should be fine. I don’t think she’s that much of a demon to feed me drugged food like this. Being fed is a bit embarrassing, but my stomach was screaming for food, so I accepted the food.

“Fufu, we really did it~”

As I munched up the rolled omelette, Nakuru put her hands on her cheeks, going ‘Kya~’. Why’s she suddenly acting all cute? Well, I guess she is a girl after all...But, you won’t deceive me with just that. After all, she’s a glasses junkie. No matter how adorable she might look, she’s an abnormality deep inside.

“Senpai, what should we do after eating lunch?” Nakuru asked me after offering me some barley tea inside a bottle.

“I thought we were just eating lunch?”

“Urk...Well, Nakuru figured this wasn’t enough, so why don’t we do something else?”

“Even if you say that...”

“How about playing catch?”

“We’re in high school now, remember. Also, it’s just the two of us anyway.”

That would make playing catch a bit difficult. Worst of all is that it wasn’t just playing catch here with Kureha, it was like an actual demon was hunting for me. Not even Jack the Ripper is that scary.

“Also, how is that going to help your slump even?”

“Uuu...Nakuru doesn’t know if it will, but it should at least create a bit of a refreshment.” Nakuru held a rice ball with two hands, and had her head hanging low.

A slump, huh. Since I don’t write novels or draw manga, I don’t even know what that really means, but it must be a hard blow for her. As proof of that, Nakuru seems much more docile than usual. She’s even holding back on glasses or BL jokes. It’s like she’s a different person compared to the trip the other day.

“...Senpai.”

Suddenly, Nakuru put down her rice ball, and looked over at me.

“Can Nakuru ask for your opinion?”

“Opinion?”

“Yes. Recently, something just won’t stop bugging Nakuru’s mind, and she thinks that this might be the reason she can’t write.”

“.....”

Seeing her suddenly grow all serious, I couldn’t say anything. Frankly speaking, I was shocked to see that glasses junkie having a thing or two she worries about as well. Maybe she took me with her simply for that? Judging from her expression, it must be something severe. I should probably be ready for that.

“Please don’t laugh, but...” Nakuru took a deep breath, like she had made up her mind. “Senpai, what do you think when looking at

Nakuru's breasts?"

"....."

Thank god I mentally prepared myself before. If not, I might have drop-kicked her right here and now. Though, I did want to retort on that.

"H-Hey, what's with that disgusted expression! Nakuru is being serious here!"

My reaction must have told Nakuru enough, as she started tearing up, pouting like a sulking child. I mean, can you blame me? She's talking about her breasts. Why are you asking me that? That's outside of my expertise. Go visit a counselor or something, he can take this in a more professional way than I ever could.

"Let Nakuru explain. Something bad happened when Nakuru went to school for extracurricular lessons."

"Something bad?" I returned a question, to which Nakuru started fidgeting.

"—Nakuru was confessed to."

"...What?"

"By a boy from her class, to be specific."

"....."

Shocked to hear this, I froze up. Um...a confession? Not prosecution? Yeah, that sounds much more plausible. After all, she's a glasses junky. It wouldn't be surprising if this greed got her into a questionable situation. But, a confession...?

"We never really talked with each other...Not to mention that Nakuru doesn't have any male friends, so when he suddenly said 'Please go out with me'..."

"H-Huh, I see. So what did you do?"

“Of course, Nakuru rejected him. Nakuru is determined.”

“Determined for what?”

“That Nakuru will offer her entire high school life to the creation of BL works.” She said with a determined voice, puffing out her chest.

I mean, I feel like that’s a different problem all-together, but I can’t see the bigger picture. How is a confession related to her chest?

“But, Nakuru couldn’t make sense out of it.”

“...About what?”

“Well, why would he suddenly confess to Nakuru? We never even talked that much. Not to mention that Nakuru doesn’t exactly have a personality that would make her liked by boys. So after thinking about it, what she came up with was...” Nakuru said, and let out a sigh.

I see, she thinks that her well-endowed chest might be related to that.

“See, boys like it when they’re bigger, right? And, Nakuru thinks that her breasts are a bit bigger than the average.”

No no no no, not just a bit. You’re in the large faction, okay.

“That’s why Nakuru was pondering about this.”

“So, it’s something like a complex, I see.”

I mean, everybody has some sort of complex. I always have trouble with my gynophobia, for example. In her case, it’s her breasts. Still...

“...Wouldn’t it be better to talk with a girl about this, instead with a boy like me? Why not ask Kureha?”

That would make it much better, you know. After all, I am XY, unlike the XX Kureha. I have no experience growing breasts like a girl.

“Nakuru did so at first, but then a problem happened.”

“A problem?”

“Yes. When Nakuru asked ‘What do you think of Nakuru’s breasts?’... Kureha-chan suddenly crushed the can of juice she had in her hand...”

“.....”

“Not to mention that it was a steel can.”

“.....”

And then she said ‘Do you want to end up like this, NaruNaru?’, showing Nakuru the can...Ever since then, Nakuru was terrified of asking Kureha-chan advice.”

“...Well, I can’t blame you.”

As I said, everybody has their own complex. When it comes to Kureha, any talk about her chest is strictly prohibited. To be perfectly honest, and looking at the recent event at the trip we went on, she has the physique of a loli.

“I don’t think you need to be that concerned about it.”

I know I was just throwing around random words, but I at least thought that cheering her up would be better than nothing.

“No clue who that guy is that confessed to you, but I doubt he confessed simply for your breasts.”

“Y-You think so? That means Nakuru’s breasts aren’t weird right? This size is totally normal, right?”

“Yeah, probably.”

You know, I want to believe. But, that guy confessed to her, knowing that she’s a glasses junkie, which makes that guy a weirdo all the same. Is it her breasts? It must be her breasts, right. Subconsciously, my gaze drifted towards her chest. As expected, they were well-endowed, and sticking out from beneath her clothes.

I really feel like her size is something else. If you were to compare it with Kureha, it’d be like looking at the state of the Vatican, and the

entire American continent. Not to mention her shape...this roundness, it had something artistic to it, and probably really soothing and comfortable...

“Senpai, you’re looking at Nakuru’s breasts while thinking about something lewd, right?”

“!?”

Crap! Shit! I messed up! To think she’d guess what I was thinking just because I was staring at her breasts for 30 seconds!

“Urk...so cruel...Maybe men really are only in it for the breasts...”

“N-No! That’s definitely not true!”

“Really?”

“Really!”

“Then, Senpai, please fondle Nakuru’s breasts right now.”

“Why!?”

“Nakuru heard that they shrink if you fondle them.”

“Who gave you such misleading and utterly wrong information!?”

“Eh? Is that not true?”

“Of course! They get bigger if you fondle them!”

“Nakuru heard about this rumour, but isn’t that about a man’s hope and dreams or something like that?”

“Urk...”

Now that she mentioned it...That logic doesn’t make much sense. How would they grow by fondling them? That nonsense just comes from boys who hope to get a chance at fondling a pair of tits. To think I would be slammed in the face with logic by a glasses junkie of all people...!

“Nakuru would have preferred to be born with a small chest.”

“Don’t you dare say that in front of Kureha, alright? She’ll kill you.”

“No, Nakuru wanted to have small breasts like Senpai.”

“Don’t call my chest small!”

“So it’s big?”

“It’s not big either!”

“Then what’s the problem? Not to mention that there’s a scene in GlassMemories where Senpai has his chest fondled by Subaru-sama, saying ‘Subaru, do boys really prefer a bigger chest after all?’, you know.”

“Don’t recreate a romcom scene in your rotten BL novel!!” I was out of breath, desperately trying to retort on all of Nakuru’s nonsense.

Whenever BL is involved, I can’t help going all out, you know. It’s like a reflexive reaction.

“—Well, whatever.” Nakuru strongly declared. “I’ll stop listening to Senpai’s opinion. From here on out, Nakuru will confirm reality with her own eyes.” She said, and stuffed the lunch box into her bag.

...What? Confirm it with her own eyes? What is she planning?

“It’s simple. Nakuru will have Senpai show that ‘Men do not fall in love only based on breasts’—with your own body, that is.”

“...!?”

I reflexively tried to dodge, but it was too late. She clung to me—or rather, it was a hug as Kureha would call it. With no warning at all, Narumi Nakuru pressed her body against mine.

“Y-You!”

“Nakuru is sorry, Senpai. She thought of letting you fondle her breasts, but that was too embarrassing for her.”

“F-For you, yeah!”

“But, now...you should be able to tell, yeah?”

“Urk...!”

S-She’s not wrong! At such a close distance, I could pick up her girly scent, and those two soft bulges, pressing onto my body...Ahhh, so fluffy and volutopus, yet elastic at the same time! I can’t describe it! All I know is that they’re swallowing me whole!

“You! Are you not embarrassed to do something like this?! You’re an adolescent girl, remember?!”

“W-What other choice is there!? This is all for the sake of Nakuru’s work!”

“How passionate can you be!?”

“It’s fine! What do you think, Senpai? H-Have you come to l-l-l-like Nakuru more?”

“Like hell I would, you moron!” I screamed at the top of my lungs.

That’s right, as you might guess, my gynophobia is activating. I could already feel shivers all over my body, goosebumps making me feel restless. Even if I get money for this, I don’t want to be tortured like this!

“Uuu...How cruel, saying it so directly.”

“Better than contradicting myself like you have been for a while now!”

“Well...this actually isn’t as bad. Even while being seduced like this, you don’t harbor any affection at all. Basically, you have the talent for BL within you...”

“Don’t you dare continue that thought!”

Shit! What am I supposed to do about this!? Give in to the temptation of her breasts, or not give in and be regarded as gay! There’s no place

for me to escape!

“Come on, Senpai~” Nakuru whispered with a sweet voice, pressing her breasts onto me even further.

On top of that, a fruity scent tickled my nose. The distance between us was small enough for our breaths to overlap.

“...!”

T-This wench, she’s definitely taking things too far with this. Even her glasses had fallen to the ground. She probably didn’t even realize this.

“...Hm?”

There, I looked at Nakuru’s face, missing her glasses, and realized. She sure looks different with her glasses off.

“Hm? What’s wrong, Senpai? You suddenly got all quiet.” Nakuru must have caught on to this irregularity, and moved away from me.

Although I wanted to scream ‘Lucky!’ for a moment, but I stopped myself, fearing that she might cling to me again.

“.....”

Think about it. Think about how to change the topic smoothly.

“There’s one thing I wanna say.”

After a few seconds of thinking time, I spoke up, trying to remain as calmly as possible.

“Your image sure is different without your glasses.”

“Excuse me?” Nakuru gave me a confused gaze.

“No, seriously. Just to let you know, it’s not like you’re not cute with your glasses on, but you give off this different kind of cuteness when you take off your glasses.”

When the glasses girl took off her glasses, she was suddenly cute.

This kind of development could only come out of a manga, but this is my only option now. I need to get through this whole confession nonsense!

“It’s like a gap, I guess? The gap with you and without your glasses. What if that was the reason the guy confessed to you, and not your breasts?”

“Urk...Now that you mention it, Nakuru would sometimes take off her glasses between classes...”

“Right? That’s what I’m talking about. Men are weak against that kind of gap. Good for you, he wasn’t just charmed by your breasts.”

“...S-So is this the so-called gap moe? Nakuru looked cuter because of that?”

“Yeah. That’s why, be more confident. You’re plenty cute.”

“N-Nakuru is cute...”

“Yeah, cute. Very cute.”

“V-Very cute...”

I repeated myself a few times to fully reassure her. No clue if this is actually gap moe or anything like that. There’s a good chance that guy was just in it for the breasts when he confessed, and he might have been attracted to Nakuru without her glasses. I have no way of knowing. But, that doesn’t matter. As long as she’s cheered up now. I don’t wanna get clung to again, but more than anything...seeing a girl sad doesn’t really sit right with me.

Also, I did feel a bit of that gap moe, I’m not even kidding. I really feel like she’s cute...as long as she stays quiet, that is.

“I-Is that so...So Nakuru was confessed to because of this gap...B-By the way, do you like girls with this kind of gap, Senpai?”

“Eh? Well, I guess? Also, why are you blushing like that?”

Nakuru covered her face with both her hands, hiding her reddened

cheeks.

“T-That’s...Well...Nakuru was never called cute by a man before.”

“Huh? But, you were confessed to, right?”

“Uuu...T-That’s all he said. Nothing more than that...And after Nakuru rejected him, he must have felt awkward and walked away...” Nakuru was agonizing.

Wah, what a rare sight this is. Normally she only talks about glasses and BL, so it’s quite unusual to see her act like a normal girl.

“T-Then, this concludes today’s date. Here is the promised reward.”

There, Nakuru took out a beautiful wrapping from her bag.

“Ohhh, thanks!”

With this, my own goal was fulfilled. It doesn’t seem to be hard cash, but I can’t exactly ask for that with a date.

“...Hm.”

Still, I wonder what’s inside here? I figured it was something to eat, like ham or noodles. That’s plenty, looking at the current food situation in my family. Any kind of food is more than welcome. Feeling a bit excited, I opened up the wrapping.

“Hmmm?”

It’s a bit small to be food. And, it’s hard. Maybe chocolate? That’d be troublesome, it would melt in this heat. After opening up the entire wrapping, what greeted me—were glasses. They were inside a plastic case, possessing a somewhat stylish design. The heck is this? Out of shock, my brain cells stopped moving entirely, only to wake up again when Nakuru let out a bashful ‘Ehehe’ laugh.

“Nakuru thought that these glasses would look best on Senpai, so she went ahead and bought them. Now you don’t have to use your money for a new pair, right? Come on, hurry up and put them on, Nakuru is sure you will reach new heights with...Hyan!?”

I didn't even let her finish her sentence, and flicked my fingers on her glasses.

"W-What are you doing!? Is the design not to your liking or something?!"

"Shut up! This isn't what I wanted!"

"E-Eh? Were you hoping for Nakuru's body instead?"

"No!"

"No way... even if it's an empty park, doing it outside for Nakuru's first time is..."

"Listen to me!"

"If possible, be kind with Nakuru..."

"Do I really have to make you shut up!?"

"With a deep kiss!?"

"Not with that!"

"Eh, then with what...Ah!? N-No, you can't...Nakuru is inexperienced, so if you were to use that...!"

"Will you give it a rest alreadyyyyy!?" I threw in a harsh rebuttal, and pushed my body forward.

However—

"N-No! Don't come any closer!"

Suddenly, I was pushed backwards. It was a perfect counter, using both of her hands. Met with this unexpected event, I fell backwards onto the ground. Seeing me like that, Nakuru let out an apologetic 'Ah'.

"S-Sorry! But...because Senpai suddenly approached Nakuru...!"

"...Huh?"

What do you mean by that? I didn't understand the meaning behind her words, as he averted her gaze.

"Well...how to say this...because of our previous conversation, Senpai suddenly had a different kind of impression in my eyes..."

"Huh?"

What's up with that? A different kind of impression...Did something inside of her change because of the conversation we had?

"Yes...that's why...I'm feeling a bit...like that, you know..."

"...Like that?"

What is she talking about?

"Like the glasses fell from my eyes."

"....."

I mean, they really did. They sure enough did fall down from your eyes. However, without being able to correct that mistake, Nakuru said 'T-Then, see you again!', and ran out of the park. As my behind was still planted on the ground, I could merely watch her run off into the distance.

¹ Also known as Yakul but kept Yakkuru for the reference, which is an animal from the Princess Mononoke movie

Chapter 4: Maid Cafe Rhapsodie

“Welcome back, Master.”

A voice resembling a bell rang out. The owner of this voice was an adorable yet unfamiliar girl, wearing a frilly maid uniform that made her look even more cute—She was a maid. That’s right, I currently found myself in a maid cafe. Just as the name ‘Maid in Heaven’ suggested, this was maid paradise.

“Hey, what are you slacking off for, stupid chicken.”

Right when I stuck out my head from the small kitchen hole, I heard this sharp voice next to me. Standing there was another girl wearing the maid apron dress. She possessed a slender stature, with a somewhat strong and confident gaze, with contrary fluffy and wavy twintails—Usami Masamune. She put one hand on her waist, and gave me a dubious gaze.

“Come on, back to work. I introduced you to this part-time job, remember?”

“I am working. Just on a break right now.”

“The heck is that? You’re only working for today, so is there really a need to take a break?” Masamune sighed with a shrug.

Because of that attitude, I felt like giving her a comment of my own, but she’s not exactly wrong. Today, I was working part-time in this maid cafe. They were lacking some help apparently, so I jumped in. Then again, my work is just washing dishes or making drinks.

“Still, I didn’t expect you to be working part-time here.”

“Wha...what’s that supposed to mean? I’m not working here because I want to. The pay here is good, and I can wear cute clothes...”

“Hmmm.”

Despite being a nasty rabbit, she had a somewhat feminine reason, huh. Well, she mentioned that she got fired from her previous part-time job, so she probably is happy to find anything. I'm the same after all. Especially after that incident with Nakuru the other day, and I didn't even get any reward for helping her out. Not to mention that it ended in such a puzzling way. I should probably ask her about that later.

"Hmpf, you better be thankful. I gave you the summer homework, and even got you into this job."

"I really am thankful for that."

This happened because I called Masamune about our summer homework. Summer homework is like a ticking time bomb. The limit of course is the new school term. That's why I asked an honor student I knew to help me with defusing the bomb. As a result of that, she even pushed this job onto me, but since I was looking for money, I didn't mind at all.

"Really, I shouldn't have answered your call at all."

"Don't be like that. Also, it sounded like you were panicking a lot back then, did I possibly interrupt you in the middle of something?"

When I called her, Masamune's answer was 'Yes! T-T-T-This is Ushami!', totally biting her tongue.

"Urk...I-I was surprised because you suddenly called me..."

"Surprised?"

"That never really happened before..."

"...Ahh, I see."

She doesn't have any friends, I remember now. Then again, I don't think it's that much of a shock, alright.

"Do you not talk with your guys from the handicrafts club or something?"

“Sending mails at most. For example, practice locations and times from the president, that’s about it. Also...the sound is different.”

“Ahh, how you have different sounds when you get a mail and when you get calls, right? I changed the ringtones myself for a few people.”

For example, Suzutsuki Kanade’s ringtone is the ‘Godfather’ theme. You know which one I’m talking about right? It’s basically the same. This ringtone is basically a signal for me to run away immediately. Works great with other people too.

“Y-Yeah, I changed it for some people too.”

“Oh really? So, what song did you use for me?”

“! T-That’s...”

For some reason, Masamune pulled down the hem of her apron dress, blushing furiously as she screamed ‘That doesn’t matter right now!’, and returned to the inside of the store...What was that about? She didn’t use the ‘Godzilla’ theme for me, did she? Well, I have that for Kureha, so I can’t really complain. But, I don’t want to be put into the same level as that monster.

“...But, just standing around here isn’t good.”

I need to properly use my break. Then again, I can pretty much just lounge around in the break room located in the back. But, better than standing around here. With these thoughts, I walked down the hallway...

“Ahaha, now that’s youth.”

“Woah!?”

Suddenly, someone tapped their hand on my shoulder. I reflexively turned around, and was met with another maid wearing similar clothes to Masamune, her black hair tied up into a ponytail. She’s the store manager, now grinning at me.

“E-Excuse me?”

“Hm? I mean, I was just thinking how great it is to be young. When I was your age, I was living my days in passion too.” The store manager nodded to herself.

Aren’t you pretty young yourself? Just looking at your outer appearance, you look like you’re in your early twenties. What you’re saying makes you sound like an old man though.

“Still, I was surprised to find out Rabbit-chan had a boyfriend.”

“What?” I looked at her in shock.

Of course, ‘Rabbit’ refers to Masamune’s name while working here.

“Fufu, good stuff, good stuff. Rabbit-chan is cute, so she has a lot of fans here, but her sharp attitude leads her to be more of a lonely existence. I was worried that she might not have any friends to begin with, but if there’s a boyfriend, then I can rest assured.”

“Um, store manager, it pains my heart to say this, but I’m not her boyfriend.”

“Wha? Really? Boring.”

“Boring...”

“I was hoping that I could tease small Rabbit-chan about this for a while.”

“.....”

Man, I wonder why, this store manager sure feels like a certain rich lady out there.

“So, you’re friends with Rabbit-chan?”

“Something like that.”

“I figured. You were having such a joyful talk just now. First time I’ve seen her like that.” The store manager laughed.

That just now looked joyful?

“Rabbit-chan sure doesn’t open up to other people, almost like she’s building a wall around her.”

“.....”

“That’s why I was shocked to hear about your case here. She randomly said ‘I’ll bring a friend over’, you know.”

“.....”

Well, she’s not wrong. Usami Masamune has trouble putting trust into other people, which is why she sounds so cold and distant.

“Make sure you take care of her, okay?”

“...I know that.”

Isn’t even up to discussion. We promised during the school festival after all. Even if she’s building up a wall, I’m gonna break that down. And right as I was thinking that—

“Hm? Did something happen over in the cafe?”

Looking over, I saw a maid jogging towards the manager, the two whispering to each other. Hm? Maybe some troublesome customer arrived? Either way, it’s not my responsibility. I’ll just let them do their thing, and take my break. I started walking, aiming for the break room, when...

“Hold on a second.” Someone grabbed me from behind.

It was the store manager, giving me a single order as I was left confused.

“You’ll be working in the cafe now.”

“Wha?”

“Also, no breaks. Big trouble, help Rabbit-chan.”

“Help...?”

I was asking for more information, but the store manager just pushed

my back along. The main cafe was equipped with several tables, like you would expect from a cafe. What gathered my attention is the table in the far back. There, I saw Masamune in her usual maid attire, and—

“...Seriously.”

When the full scenery entered my mind, I let out a groan. Sitting at the table was a girl wearing a frilly goth loli dress not losing against the maid dress in the slightest. She had her black hair tied up into twintails, and showed a smirk at my appearance.

“Jirou-kun, that’s where you say ‘Welcome back, young lady’, and not ‘Seriously’, you know?”

It was Suzutsuki Kanade. The only daughter of our school’s board chairman showed me a gracious smile.

♀ × ♂

“Have a seat. I just paid so you two can spend some time with me.” Suzutsuki said, as Masamune and I stood shocked in front of the table.

She paid for us? I looked over at the store manager, whose pupils had changed into \$ symbols, gesturing us to sit down. That damn Devil Suzutsuki, she probably bribed her, right. What is this, some VIP pass?

“Y-You know that this is a maid cafe, right? Why are you acting like this is some hostess bar?” Masamune grit her teeth as she sat down facing Suzutsuki.

Having a maid sit with you at a table is not part of the service at this cafe. Also, the same goes for people working in the kitchen, like me. Thanks to that, all the customers and maids were directing their attention towards us. This is some kind of public embarrassment, alright.

“Also, why would some rich lady like you come to a maid cafe?”

“What’s the problem? I passed by this place during my shopping trip,

and I spotted you wearing such an adorable uniform. Not to mention that Jirou-kun was further back in the kitchen. Now I could only come inside, you know.”

“What’s that even mean? You just came here to tease us again, didn’t you.”

“It seemed interesting, so of course.”

“Don’t walk into a maid cafe for that reason alone.” I complained, and sat down myself.

Since Suzutsuki is wearing her uniform, she probably had some business at the school. And then she just happened to pass by this cafe...Hm? Something doesn’t add up.

“Hey, where is Konoe?”

That’s right, Konoe Subaru is nowhere to be found, despite her usually always clinging to Suzutsuki, as she is her butler.

“Ah, I shook him off just now.”

“What?”

“Young lady, where have you gone!?', he said. I wanted to see him panic a bit while trying to follow my traces like a hamster stuffing its cheeks with food, and lost him.”

“Your personality is as rotten as always, I see!”

“Eh? My, you’re embarrassing me. I didn’t think you would praise me.”

“That sure wasn’t anything resembling praise, you know.”

How positive can you be? No, how cruel can you be, leaving your butler alone like that. She must be worrying a lot right about now.

“It’s fine, I sent him an email saying ‘I’ll be travelling for a while’.”

“Even small brats leave a better message when they run away from

home.”

“Don’t make such a scary face, will you. Even I have days where I want to be alone.”

“That’s fine, but don’t trouble Konoe that much.”

“You really are as kind as always when it comes to Subaru.”
Suzutsuki smiled, and turned her gaze towards Masamune. “So then, dear maid, what kind of service are you offering here?”

“Ah, then please have a look at our menu and decide for...Wait, why do I have to speak all politely to you like this!?”

“How rude, I am a customer right now.”

“So who would become your maid, huh!?” Masamune averted her gaze from Suzutsuki.

“How cruel. You won’t even say ‘Welcome home, young lady’ to me?”

“Welcome home, young lady.”

“Fufu, all stiff and awkward. You’re like a template tsundere.”

“Wha...who’s a tsundere!? I’m not doing this for you, okay!”

“That’s what a tsundere would say.”

“What do you mean!?”

“You don’t understand it, my dear Rabbit-san?”

“It’s Usami! Not Usagi!”

“But, it does say ‘Rabbit’ on your nameplate?”

“Urk...that’s just because the manager put that on me...”

“Hmm, I see, Rabbit-chan.”

“Don’t call me Rabbit-chan!”

“...Can’t you get along some more?” I broke between the two.

Their compatibility really is just the worst. They’re average commoner and rich lady, and even when they’re maid and customer, that does not change.

“Fufu, let me think. How about we have a bit of fun? Dear maid, I’d like to order this ‘Doodle Omelette’. You’ll write a message on there for me, right?”

“Fine by me, I’ll go ahead and write ‘F**K YOU’ just for you.”

“Also, I would like the ‘Picture Time~’ option too.”

“I don’t mind, but you’re probably better off without it. I’m really bad when it comes to taking pictures.”

“Oh yeah, you were really against any photoshoots, right.”

This ‘Picture Time~’ service basically allows you to take a picture with the maid you prefer. From what I heard, Masamune is pretty popular, and gets a lot of requests like these, but she rejects them every time. She really hates taking pictures.

“I don’t mind, but the store manager will probably stop it.”

“What?”

“You know, we did this before, but the customer’s face ended up all twisted and distorted.”

“.....”

“The second time, the customer didn’t have any head left.”

“.....”

“And for the third time, there stood some unfamiliar girl with white clothing behind the customer, trying to reach for the camera...”

“Alright, Masamune. I get how bad you are at taking pictures, so calm down.”

That's right, the place she's living at is a possessed property—a real-life haunted house. Since the rent there is fairly cheap, Masamune is trying her best and still lives there, but to think this would even influence her taking pictures. Also, she's clearly being possessed no matter how you look at it.

“Hey, why not have your place get exorcised at least once?”

It might not be on the level of Kureha, but I equally am not the best at dealing with the occult. Thinking of my friend being possessed by a ghost has me shivering.

“...! N-N-No need to worry. But...I'm happy that you're worried about me...” Masamune suddenly grew silent, all the while blushing furiously.

...The heck is that about? Did her consciousness finally get swallowed up by that ghost? Ahh, please don't. If so, then I can't be staying here. It's time to exorcise this evil ghost. I should call a nun first.

“Fufu, you are unexpectedly close, I see.”

There, Suzutsuki suddenly opened her mouth.

“Wha...D-Don't get the wrong idea, Suzutsuki Kanade! Me and that stupid chicken aren't that close or anything!”

“Really? Even though you work together at a part-time job?”

“That's just a return for me offering the stupid chicken the summer homework...”

“So it was an equivalent exchange?”

“Y-Yeah...”

“I see, so you're not even that close at all.”

“Urk...”

“And yet, you're friends despite that.”

“Urgh...I-I wasn’t saying that...”

“But, there’s no particular reason you’re working together, right?”

“~~~! B-But! We did eat lunch at my place before!”

“...Lunch? Just the two of you?”

“That’s right! Together...and just the two of us...we ate lunch together, so we are still fairly good friends!” Masamune puffed out her chest.

That sure is vague. Not to mention that she’s starting to contradict herself compared to what she initially said. Are we close or not? I mean, I’d categorize us as normal friends, but...

“I see. That would mean—that Jirou-kun and I are also fairly good friends.”

“Eh?” Masamune lost her confident expression, and froze up.

“After all, he ate lunch at my home before too.”

“Wha...” Masamune almost fell off her chair.

Oh yeah, that did happen. It happened back during April after the leisure land incident. She treated me to some food after my injuries were healed, I think.

“B-But! It wasn’t just the two of you, right!”

“Indeed, Kureha-chan and Subaru were with us. We’re all very close, almost like a family you could say.”

“F-Family...”

“Not to mention that...he used my bed during that time.”

“What’s that supposed to mean!?”

“Don’t misunderstand, I just had him rest because of his injuries. He didn’t stay over.”

“R-Really? Don’t say such misleading things.” Masamune let out a sigh.

However, she would regret that moments later.

“—But, I actually stayed over at Jirou-kun’s place before.” Suzutsuki dropped a bombshell.

“!?” Masamune froze up beautifully.

In response to that, the rich lady continued in a calm manner.

“When I ran away from home, he let me stay over.”

“R-Ran away from home...!”

“It was a lot of trouble, you know? When staying over at his home, I was forced to wear a maid uniform.”

“How did that happen!?”

“Isn’t that obvious? I became his maid, so I had to properly serve him.”

“...!? That’s a lie! There’s no way that happened...”

“I’m not lying. You should be able to tell, right, Usami-san.”

“Urk...!” Masamune gripped the hem of her skirt, pulling it down in frustration.

Following that, she directed her gaze over at me.



“What’s this about, stupid chicken!? What are you making your classmate do!?”

“D-Don’t jump to conclusions! There’s a proper reason for that!”

“Reason...So what she said is true!?”

“Well...Yeah.”

“~~~!”

“Come on, don’t look at me like I’m some shounen manga villain!”

I can’t deny that what Suzutsuki said is the truth. It happened during Golden Week, when I had Konoe stay over after she ran away from home, and Suzutsuki started some weird ‘let’s see who is more worthy of being a servant of this family’ contest, with her being a maid vs the butler Konoe. But, now she’s using a rather suggestive way of phrasing things. She’s making it sound like I’m actually into this sort of stuff.

“I-I’ve underestimated you! I didn’t think you were that much of a pervert!”

“Calm down, and properly think about it!”

“You made Suzutsuki Kanade wear a maid uniform, right!?”

“There’s a proper reason for that!”

“Not to mention that you tied her up on the bed, and violated her the entire night...”

“Who mentioned anything like that!? Do I really look like that much of a pervert?! Look at me!”

“Eh...”

“Why are you staying quiet there!”

“I mean, the second you walked into this cafe, you were ogling the maids, right.”

“I was not!?”

“Be careful, Usami-san, he is very passionate towards maids... Especially towards the garter belt.”

“Don’t add anything unnecessary, you wench!”

“...I knew it.”

“Why are you agreeing like that!?”

“When he stayed at my residence, he said ‘I want to get hung up with a garter belt’.”

“I do not remember awakening to some messed up fetish like that!”

No matter what I say, they will take it the wrong way. Also, that nasty rabbit is known to always get the wrong idea. It’s like she’s living on misunderstanding things. Are these two actually pretty close?

“Masamune, let me just say one thing. Nothing questionable happened, okay.”

“Even though you made her wear maid clothes?”

“She decided to wear those herself, okay. Not to mention that Suzutsuki wasn’t the only one staying over. Konoe was with her, and Kureha was at home too.”

“Eh? R-Really? So, there was no lewd roleplay going on all night?”

“Of course not. Nothing like that happened.”

“.....Okay. I don’t know the details, but if nothing happened, then that’s fine. You better be thankful, I actually am putting my trust in you.”

“Yeah, thanks. Though I was just wondering, why are you so desperate about this?”

“Eh?”

“I mean, this entire conversation.”

She didn’t have to bite into every small thing, right? I feel like Suzutsuki was just making up stuff to get more reactions out of her too.

“T-That’s...you know. Wouldn’t you hate it if a friend of yours was into some nasty stuff? That’s why I couldn’t help but feel curious. You

are innocent in the end, so what's it matter!" Masamune explained with a strong tone in her voice, as she averted her gaze.

About that, I guess? I do know people in my class who are perverts. Like Tamura, who openly stated 'My head exists to be stepped on by a beauty!', or something like that. For him, it's already too late. Even bleach can't clean his rotten brain.

"...Jeez."

Either way, that concludes me being accused, I guess. All this maid nonsense is making my head spin. Like some garter belt is enough to make me go crazy.

"You're too naive, Usami-san." There, Suzutsuki spoke up with an oddly serious tone. "It's impossible to dismiss the possibility of Jirou-kun's excessive interest in the maid moe at this state."

"Shut up, Suzutsuki. Are you trying to rile things up again?"

"You be quiet, Jirou-kun. Frankly speaking, you're in a grey to black area. No matter what you say with your mouth, we don't know what you truly feel."

"What I truly feel?"

"For example, stuff like 'That's not a skirt! It's a restrictive tool to hold back the true strength of a garter belt!', you know."

"Are you saying that a garter belt is that powerful!?"

To a level where you have to use a skirt to suppress its strength!? Like hell anybody would believe that!

"That does make sense, yes." Masamune nodded to herself.

"...!? Hold up, are you just blindly believing her nonsense now?!"

"Huh? What are you talking about, stupid chicken. I'm trying to say that a part of your unorthodox interests—might be deeply rooted in your interest for maids."

“.....”

Okay, hold on Masamune-san. What are you talking about?

“We should probably confirm that as quickly as possible.”

“Agreed. Jirou-kun is our friend after all, and we have the duty to protect our friends. It wouldn’t be good if something bad happened here at this maid cafe.”

“How much of a maid fanatic am I in your eyes!?”

They’re treating me like I was a ticking time bomb now.

“But, how can we confirm that?” Masamune put one hand on her jaw, thinking.

Immediately after that...

“Rest assured, I have an idea.” Suzutsuki showed a grin. “You just have to show your garter belt to Jirou-kun.”

“.....”

Now hold on. What exactly did she come up with now?

“Wha...Y-You! What are you talking about!”

It seems like Masamune agreed with me on that one. She even pulled down her skirt in a panic, almost as to preemptively hide what was beneath that.

“You really don’t understand it, Usami-san. Right now, you are a maid that you can find anywhere. Basically, if Jirou-kun can win against your seduction, that means he’s not a maid fanatic.”

“I get where you’re coming from, but...S-S-Seduction!?”

“I called it that way, but it’s not anything complicated. You just have to faintly lift up your long skirt, and flash your garter belt to him.”

“Wha!?”

“Of course, adding ‘Please forgive me, Master...’ with tears in your eyes.”

“This feels like some messed up roleplay, you know?!”

“You can’t do that? Aren’t you Jirou-kun’s friend? Right now, it’s most important that we find out if he holds such an unorthodox interest or not, remember?”

“Urk...”

“Or, is this what I think it is? Is this the pattern where you actually have feelings for Jirou-kun, but you don’t want to show any embarrassing sight of yours in front of him, which makes you hesitate because of that?”

“Wha—”

Psssshhh, steam started rising from Masamune’s head, as she blushed furiously.

“L-L-L-Like hell that’s true!”

“Eh? You don’t like him, but actually love him?”

“N-N-No, of course not! There’s no way I would like this stupid chicken! Not love him either! There’s nothing!”

“I see, then hurry up and lift up your skirt.”

“!?”

“It’s fine, you don’t need to show your underwear, just flash your garter belt.”

“~~~!” Masamune started tearing up, and slowly confirmed her surroundings.

Joining her, I saw that most customers had left by now. At the same time, a majority of the maids had returned to their own work, not paying us any attention. This was a chance. A fortunate good timing. No matter what may happen at this table, only we would know.

“.....U-Understood, my lady.”

After a long silence, Usami Masamune declared these words with a feeble voice. She must have made up her mind, as she spoke up like a maid, and stood up. Her long apron dress swayed in the movement, and she moved in front of me. Following that, she put her hands on her skirt—

“.....!”

As her eyes were tearing up fully with embarrassment, she slowly raised her skirt. What appeared were snow white over-knee socks. Black and white: Black enameled shoes and the white contrast of the socks. The further the skirt was lifted up, the more an adorable ribbon on the knee socks appeared. Her skirt fluttered even further, until I was allowed to see her pure white garter belt.

“.....”

Silence followed, awkwardly filling the atmosphere. And then...The girl spoke up with quivering lips, trying her hardest to not cry.

“...P-Please forgive me, Master...!”

“.....”

T-The heck is this. In terms of exposure, this isn't any different from a normal miniskirt. And yet...

“—!”

Crap. I don't really get it, but this situation is dangerous. A maid—Masamune—was carefully lifting up her skirt to the very limit. This black and white apron dress, the adorable frills everywhere, the snow white over-knee socks, her flushed cheeks, her dampened eyes, her physique quivering in embarrassment, and the garter belt in my sight —

“.....”

...I can't. I'll stop trying to hide it. I can't hide my true feelings anymore. Doing so would just be rude towards Masamune...No, this

maid in front of me. I will confess right here. I like them, I love maids a lot. Garter belts are true culture!

“—What a shame, time’s up it seems.”

It happened right when I wanted to confess these feelings inside of me. Suzutsuki suddenly opened her mouth, to which Masamune frantically pushed down her skirt. Immediately after—

“Young lady!”

The front door of the cafe opened up in a storm, a familiar alto voice reached our desk in the back—It was Konoe Subaru, Suzutsuki Kanade’s personal butler, totally out of breath.

“I’ve been searching for you, young lady.”

“My, Subaru, I’m shocked you knew I was here.”

“It was just a coincidence. I was walking down the street, when I saw you through the window.”

“I see, so it was similar to what I did.” Suzutsuki smiled gently like nothing happened.

So basically, she realized that Konoe passed in front of the door, and told Masamune to stop. That was dangerous...if Konoe saw this situation just now...It seems like she could only see Suzutsuki through the window.

“I’m sorry for suddenly running off like that.”

“No, I’m just glad you’re okay...So, what are you doing here, Jirou?” She turned towards me with a stare.

After confirming the safety of her master, she must have gotten curious about me being here for some reason.

“Ahh, Jirou-kun is helping in this cafe. By the way, Usami-san is working part-time here.” Suzutsuki took the job of explaining the circumstances in my stead, to which Konoe narrowed her eyes with a dubious ‘...Hmmm’ reaction.

“Subaru, let’s hurry back to the residence.”

“Yes, young lady, let’s.”

Suzutsuki stood up from her seat, and waved her hand at us with ‘See you another time. Do your best with your work, Usami-san’. Konoe followed after her. And, after we’ve watched the two off...

“...I sure feel tired.” Masamune let out an exhausted sigh.

Not exactly surprising, I couldn’t help but agree. Suzutsuki is always causing chaos, and now this stress is gone, so I feel like I just ran a marathon.

“Hm?”

Right after Suzutsuki was gone, a certain doubt filled my heart. Thinking about it rationally, something was odd about this whole incident. Judging from what Suzutsuki said during the summer festival, she’s bad at dealing with Masamune, even referring to her as her natural enemy. Maybe she had a different reason that led her to come here?

“But, good for you. We confirmed that your tastes aren’t unorthodox at all. But...that just now sure was embarrassing.” Masamune must have remembered the whole garter belt thing right now, and started blushing again.

...I can’t tell her. If she shows me that kind of face, I don’t dare to tell her I actually completely fell for the charm of a maid. Damn it, what’s wrong with liking maids? Is it bad to feel eroticism with a garter belt? Well, I sort-of feel like an outlaw saying this.

“Don’t worry, I wouldn’t suddenly run amok in a maid cafe either way.”

“Hmpf, of course. Such a crime has never happened in this country before.”

“You can say that again. Then again, I probably won’t visit a maid cafe again.”

Working there part-time is fun and all, but the cost for being a regular at a maid cafe is no joke. I could use up the money we get from Mom, but Kureha would kill me in the process. That's why, today is probably the last day I will be coming here. Farewell, my beloved maids. Let's meet again, garter belts.

"...Eh?" However, Masamune looked at me in surprise. "R-Really? You won't come here again?"

"Hm? I mean, yeah? I was supposed to only work here today."

"Urk...that's true, but..."

For some reason, Masamune suddenly grew quiet...? Well, whatever. With Suzutsuki gone, I should go back to the kitchen or I'll get an earful. I'm a bit curious about Masamune's reaction just now, but I can just ask her after my shift. I turned around, and was about to walk away, when—

"W-Wait!"

Suddenly, someone grabbed the hem of my shirt. Turning around, Masamune looked up at me like a small child asking their mother to buy them something. And with no warning at all, she spoke up.

"...Stop by again."

"Huh?"

"I-I'm telling you to come work here again another time. The store manager is constantly complaining about the lack of personnel in the kitchen, so she'd be happy. And, if you come over again...I'll show you my homework in the future too."

"....."



I mean, I don't mind. Getting homework for free sounds mighty juicy, but coming here again to work...

"W-What's the big problem? Shouldn't be that bad of a deal, right..."
Masamune sounded oddly anxious, devoid of her usual confident tone.

...Ahh, I see. I finally understand what's going on. She probably

doesn't want to work here all on her own. The store manager mentioned that she wasn't getting along with any of her colleagues. That's why she wanted a friend around that would make her feel at ease...

"...Alright."

After thinking about it for a moment, I agreed to Masamune's request.

"R-Really?"

"Yeah. But, only from time to time. I can't come here every day."

I'm not part of a club, but I do get personal fighting lessons from Konoe and Kureha, so I can't exactly skip out on that.

"O-Okay." Masamune blushed yet again, seemingly out of relief this time.

...Yeah, this is fine. If she's feeling better thanks to it, I don't mind stopping by once in a while. After all, we're friends.

"U-Um...stupid chicken."

"Hm?"

"Ah...well...um..." Masamune stuttered over her own words for a moment, only to continue. "Thanks!"

Leaving behind these awkwardly conveyed words, Masamune ran towards the kitchen.

"....."

That surprised me. To think that nasty rabbit would actually thank me like that. Considering how twisted she normally is, I never expected that.

"Well, won't hurt once in a while."

It's not like I was happy to receive this gratitude from a maid. Also, I

know I'm repeating myself but...when she's honest, Masamune sure is cute.

"Anyway, better get back to the kitchen myself." I muttered to myself, and made my way to the kitchen.

Also, why did Masamune run off to the kitchen as well? She's responsible for the inside of the cafe, right? Well, she probably just wanted to get away after saying thank you.

"—Hm?"

There, I found something dropped on the floor. Approaching it and picking it up, I realized it was a phone with a cute pink design. Does this belong to Masamune by any chance? Must have dropped it while running away.

"Waaah, she's pretty girly in some things, huh."

I happened to see the display of the phone, and how she had an adorable rabbit as a screensaver. Despite hating the idea of being called rabbit, she sure loves them, huh.

"Hmmm? But, this...Ah, what is she doing? She doesn't have the phone in silent mode."

She probably forgot about setting it up that way. Seriously, and you tell me to work properly? What if your phone rang in the middle of work? Oh yeah, not that it matters since she doesn't have any friends...

"....."

Oh yeah, thinking about that, she said she changed some of the ringtones for specific people. If so, I wonder if she did that for me, and what song she used.

"....."

On a whim, curiosity got the better of me, and I called her phone. I couldn't help but want to know, okay.

“Oh.”

There, the ringtone started playing. From the sound itself, it sounded like a musical box version. Hmm, I wonder, this calm and warm melody, I heard this before. In middle school, I feel like someone played this during a choir. It was pretty popular in grade and middle school too, so it was often sung for graduation ceremonies and so on. Um, I think it was called...

“Y-You heard it, right...?”

There, I heard a quivering voice. When I turned towards the source of the voice, I spotted a maid with twintails—Usami Masamune. She probably realized that she dropped her phone and came back. Seeing me with her phone in hand, her body was shaking in anger...Oh lord, I should probably...run away.

The second I judged so, my body reacted automatically, and I just started dashing towards the entrance of the cafe, jumping out into the streets.

“Ah, don’t run away!” A sharp voice screamed.

As expected, she came running after me. Turning around, she held the hem of her skirt with both her hands, and chased me. Thanks to that, she gathered all the attention from the people walking down the street. I feel like this will turn into a great advertisement. The time of day must have progressed quite a bit, as the streets were colored in a strong orange. As I ran along the street, Masamune’s phone was still vibrating and playing the song. This musical box melody seemed so familiar even now...

“...Ah.”

I finally remembered the name of the song. Man, I actually can’t blame her for being angry. Seriously, this doesn’t match with her usual nasty personality. After all, the name of the song is ‘Believe’.

“...Jeez.”

That stupid rabbit. Even if you only have me as a friend you can rely on, you actually went and used that? Damn it, you’re making me feel

all embarrassed because of that.

“S-Sorry! I was just a bit curious, that’s all!”

“Shut up, stupid chicken! It’s fine! You probably won’t die!”

“What do you plan on doing!?”

“Shut up shut up shut up! It’s all your fault! N-N-Now that it’s come to this, I will teleport you up to heaven while you listen to this song!”

“You’re trying to send me on a trip to hell, aren’t you!?”

Well, I guess I should at least run until I come up with a method to make her calm down. If I went down on my knees, she might just forgive me. I mean, you know. That’s what makes us friends, right? With these thoughts in mind, I kept running from Masamune who continued to scream ‘Wait right there!’ behind my back.

Chapter 5: Summer Finale

The 31st of August has arrived, and for all high school students in this country, this day has a very special meaning. Indeed, this is the last day of summer break, the final stretch before school restarts. I'm sure we all have different ways to spend it. There's normies who reminisce about all the normie events they enjoyed, as well as those who curse normies as they hold a race against time in order to finish their summer homework.

If you were to ask me which faction I belong to, it'd definitely be the latter. I already finished my summer homework, but my current excitement is reaching an Armageddon level of danger for my psyche, and I genuinely feel like I wouldn't mind if the world ended now. I mean, it's not like this summer break wasn't fun or anything. I even met up with the friends from my class here and there, and got to enjoy a live concert from the band I like.

However, some events completely overwrote all of that. I mean, the whole elopement trip was far better than being forced through hellish training by Mom, and definitely was exciting, that's for sure.

However, the sheer amount of trouble these past four days sure is no joke. From the 27th to the 30th, I would run into various events with Suzutsuki, Kureha, Nakuru, and Masamune. It made me feel like I was some galge protagonist who constantly run into girls along the way.

That's why I decided. Today, the 31st of August, will be a day I spend in solitude, without anybody else around. There's times where you want to be alone, and that day is today. Luckily enough, the little monster of this family, Kureha, was currently out. Apparently they're having some last-spurt homework sleepover party at a friend's house or something.

What great timing, truly. If this was a normal family, the father might worry about 'Maybe she's actually staying over at her boyfriend's house...' but we are different. Dating Kureha? Who'd be that suicidal? Even Ja*k Bauer¹ wouldn't do that. That being the case, it's

just me at home right now.

It's honestly not bad. These past few days were just way too noisy. Of course, the same will happen once the second-term starts, so I want at least a break for a single day. But of course, as I was thinking that, at around 1.15pm in the afternoon.

“M-Morning, Jirou.”

Upon answering the doorbell and opening the door, I was greeted by this all-too-familiar alto voice. Standing there was a handsome boy, properly wearing a butler's attire even amidst this unbearable heat. I was looking at my favorite cross-dressing female butler, and her familiar glittering bright hair, and her facial features and physique looking as if they had been created by hand—Konoe Subaru.

Right when I opened the door, she gave me an awkward greeting... Alright, what kind of situation is this? I have a horrible feeling about this. It's like I'm exploring a jungle only to run into a wild tiger. Well, I actually ran into a wild butler in this concrete jungle, so close enough. Also, why am I such an idiot. Why did I go and even open this door, right after deciding I'd keep myself locked up in my room.

“Yo, what's up? Didn't expect you.”

Ignoring her of course would not be a good option either, so I at least greeted her back. However, Konoe for some reason averted her gaze. Hmm, she really has been acting off as of late. She always had a somewhat cold and sour expression, but this is different than before. It feels more awkward.

“...I-I actually wanted to ask you a favor, Jirou.” Konoe said so, after finally looking me in the eyes again.

And then, she grabbed the hem of her own uniform, looking uncertain about something.

“—Can we cook together?”

These were the words following, leaving me baffled.

“For now, this should be all the ingredients we need.”

I put down all the food we just bought at the nearby supermarket, and put the plastic bag on the kitchen floor. Konoe's request was for me to help with her cooking. Apparently, she really wants to treat her master Suzutsuki to some good flipping food for everything Suzutsuki has done for her, which is why she wanted to make food at my place, and then call Suzutsuki over for dinner.

“But, why'd you ask me?” I asked, while putting on an apron.

Honestly speaking, I don't have much cooking experience either, except the base minimum.

“I figured that someone helping me would be better in the long run.”

“I mean, I get that. Just wondering why you didn't just ask one of the servants living at your residence.”

Our kitchen here isn't even anything special. No matter how I think about it, if one wants quality guaranteed, asking for help in their residence is most efficient.

“T-That's...”

For some reason, Konoe showed a somewhat dejected reaction. And with her head hanging low, she continued.

“...I can't make anything.”

“What?”

“I mean...at the residence, they're making the food for me. So, I could only come to your place...”

“.....”

Ahh, I remember. She's horrendously bad at cooking despite being a butler.

“Wha...d-don't give me such a condescending look! I was just prohibited from entering the kitchen for a while!”

“I’m glad to hear it’s not a forever ban.”

“~~~! Everyone is looking down on me and my cooking...!” Konoe pouted like a child.

I mean, that’s about to be expected with Konoe’s well-known detrimental cooking sense. After all, when she made rice porridge before, she pretty much ruined my taste buds single-handedly. Also, prohibiting entrance to the kitchen, just how much did she mess up for that to happen?

“Don’t worry, we’ll make something good.” I smiled and reassured Konoe.

I’m not the one eating it this time either, it’ll be Suzutsuki. Though, I will have to send her some stomach medicine later.

“...Yeah, I’m sure. As long as we do it carefully and taste it as we go along, it’ll be delicious, I bet.”

“Y-Yeah, right.”

Let me retract that statement, I might have to get some stomach medicine myself. If I’m not careful, today might not only be the last day of summer break, but also of my entire life.

“But, are you sure?” Konoe took out the ingredients from the plastic bag while asking. “Should we really be making curry?”

“Hm? What’s so bad about it? Curry is perfect during summer, right?”

Or was that some advertisement stick?

“I mean, since we’re making something for the young lady, I wish it’d be a bit more...noble.”

“Noble?”

“Something like Peking duck.”

“.....”

She's really throwing requests now, huh. That's not something you could make at a commoner's house like mine.

"Also, maybe butter-roasted foie gras."

"Sorry, Konoe, the best I can offer you is curry."

"Wha...what are you saying! Can't it be a bit more...luxurious?"

"Fine white noodles?"

"It's turning even more simple!?"

"Shaved ice?"

"Are you making fun of me!?" Konoe pouted, adding. "Fine, I'll do it myself."

Waaah, I took it too far. She might destroy my kitchen if things continue.

"I-It's fine, curry is a popular dish with everybody."

"Hm..."

"By the way, I love curry."

"R-Really? Oh yeah, I think the young lady said she enjoyed it herself..."

"Right? I'm telling you, it's a good choice."

"...Hm, I see. Curry might be the safest choice."

"Right, and that's the best for us." I said, and secretly sighed to myself.

I somehow managed to calm her down. I'm glad Suzutsuki likes curry. But, that's actually pretty surprising...and a bit cute if you ask me.

"Yeah, curry isn't half bad. Today's favorite is her chicken curry after all."

“.....”

I would like to protest against that. I mean, chicken curry? Because of my own disposition, the second I hear the word chicken, I tense up. Even more so since we were talking about Suzutsuki.

“The young lady also absolutely adores roasted chicken, fried chicken with vinegar and tartar sauce, teriyaki chicken...”

“I feel like I’m starting to see a pattern here...”

“Hm, not at all. She also likes food with no chicken in it.”

“For example?”

“Chi*ken ramen.”

“I mean, that’s ramen, but still!”

If memory serves me right, they did use chicken for the soup. Also, a rich lady is eating ramen? Color me surprised.

“Jirou, let’s start.”

As I was lost in thought, Butler-kun pulled me back to reality. With that, our cooking show started. Konoe still isn’t wearing her apron. Apparently she wanted to wear her butler uniform while cooking. Not like I care though.

“Then, you start washing the rice. I’ll cut the meat and vegetables.” I said while washing the vegetables first.

As a reminder, there’s a specific reason why Konoe is bad at cooking, which is her phobia of knives. Just by looking at blades, let alone touching them, she starts tensing up. That’s why cutting will be my duty. Team play is important.

“R-Right. Thanks, Jirou.” Konoe must have caught on to my considerate thinking, and thanked me.

Hm? For some reason, her cheeks turned into a faint red then and there. Or, is that just my imagination?

“Konoe, your face is red. Are you not feeling well?”

“!?”

Hearing my words, Konoe covered her face with both her hands, and started blushing even further.

“Ah...well...this is...I actually have a bit of a fever.”

“A fever? A summer cold?”

“Y-Yeah, I’ve been feeling a bit sick as of late...Ah, I’m not lying okay!”

I don’t know why, but she sure turned pushy towards the end there. Well, a summer cold generally sticks with you for a while. That might be the reason why she’s been acting off as of late.

“You can take a rest if you want.”

“I-I’m fine! Well, not really, but I can at least cook!” Konoe said, and made her way to the rice cooker.

She’s fine but not fine? What’s that even supposed to mean? I mean, as long as she doesn’t collapse on me, it’s fine.

“But, Jirou, aren’t you pretty good at cooking?”

“Why’d you think that?”

“I mean, you were working part-time at that maid cafe yesterday, right.”

“Well, you’re not wrong...”

But, the best thing I did there was wash plates. I was a useless pinch hitter, you can say.

“...Not to mention you were working there together with Usami.”

“That doesn’t have anything to do with cooking to my knowledge?”

“You’re not wrong, but...Oh yeah, why were you even working with

her?”

“Hm? Suzutsuki never told you? Masamune gave me her homework to copy, so I helped at her part-time job.”

“Homework?”

“Yup, the summer homework.”

“I could have shown you as well...” Subaru-sama mumbled quietly.

Seriously? I figured she’d be all serious and diligent about it, which is why I chose to ask Masamune instead. Maybe I could have saved myself the work and asked Konoe instead from the very beginning.

“By the way, when is Kureha-chan coming home? She went to a friend’s place today, right?” Konoe suddenly changed the topic.

Oh yeah, I briefly mentioned it while we were shopping at the supermarket.

“I forgot to tell you, but she isn’t coming home today.”

“What? What do you mean?”

“Apparently a friend of hers is throwing a sleepover party, so until you call Suzutsuki over, it’ll be just the two of us.”

Right as I finished my sentence, Konoe crushed the rice in her hand with her palm. Following that, she started shaking, stuttering over her own words.

“J-Just the two of us...Seriously?”

“Yup, she’ll be gone all day. Also, I think it’d be better if you carefully washed the rice instead.”

I mean, there’s no need to treat your rice like the person who killed your parents. You’ll totally mess it up, in more than one way.

“Is your cold getting worse?”

“...! N-No, of course not. See, I am properly washing the rice. Uhh,

next is...”

“!? Hold on! You don’t need to use detergent when washing the rice!”
I frantically stopped Konoe’s hand, which was reaching for the detergent near the sink.

That was dangerous, she almost ruined the rice. Also, I think her cold really is getting worse, her face is getting more red by the second.

“Okay, I’m done over here.”

I finished cutting the meat and vegetables. It’s not my best job, but it should do just fine. That makes it a bit more wild, and delicious anyway, I bet.

“...Apologies, Jirou. If not for you, I wouldn’t be able to make anything.”

“Don’t sweat it. We’re friends...best friends after all.”

“Y-Yeah...”

For some reason, Konoe lowered her head and grew silent. Hey now, why are you suddenly feeling down because of that? That’s what you wanted us to be, right? Maybe she’s just not used to it yet?

“.....”

Alright, it’s a bit embarrassing, but I should probably really emphasize us being best friends here. That should leave her at ease, I bet. So, for starters...

“—Konoe.”

“Hm? What’s up, Jirou.”

“We...are best friends.”

“Urk...Yeah, we are...”

“I’m sure that this relationship won’t change, no matter what may happen.”

“Ugh...”

“That’s right, we’ll always be...best friends.”

“.....”

“I firmly believe that friendship is possible between a man and a woman.”

“.....”

“That’s why we’ll always stay—”

“...Jirou, I get it already. I get it, so stop.” Konoe complained, as a dark aura started to grow behind her back.

W-What? Why do you look so shocked? Maybe it’s because I was saying some cringey stuff? I think I tried my best, considering how embarrassing it sounded...However, the gloomy atmosphere in the kitchen did not disappear. We only exchanged the bare minimum of words, as we worked on the food. With the rice in the rice cooker, all we could do was wait.

At the same time, I put the chicken meat, carrots, and the onions into a pot, boiling it with water. All that’s left is to lower the temperature once it starts seething, and putting in the potatoes. Finishing touches will be adding the curry powder we bought beforehand. There’s not many things to mess up here.

I mean, it would totally be doable if Konoe dropped an entire bottle of salad dressing into the pot, or added the vodka we had in the kitchen to roast the meat instead, but that’s about it. Then again, I’m surprised this hasn’t happened yet. Things are going fairly smoothly right now. All we had to do was wait now...

“...Jirou.”

However, as expected, my anxiety proved to be right.

“Do you have something like a subtle seasoning we could add?”

Right as I wanted to add the powder, Konoe blurted out something

like that.

“Subtle seasoning?”

“Yeah, like a secret ingredient. Right now, it’s just plain old curry. If the young lady is going to eat it, I want it to be special, our one of a kind.”

“.....”

I sense great danger in the force. If my experience serves as enough of a danger indicator, then this could turn out fatal.

“L-Let’s not. It’s going well so far, I wouldn’t want to ruin it.”

“Don’t say that. Since everything is working out, we should aim for something even better, don’t you agree?” Her eyes were sparkling like a puppy’s chasing after a soccer ball.

Following that, she started rummaging through the kitchen in an attempt to find anything worthwhile. Please, don’t ruin this now. What did we even have in our kitchen? We already ate all the apples, and Kureha’s been on a tomato boom lately, so they pretty much are part of every meal recently. Also, anything that Mom brought with her from her trips...

“...Ohh, what about this?”

There, Konoe took out a bottle filled with liquid from a shelf inside the kitchen. Ah, that’s...

“Looks like wine.”

“Wine?”

“Yup, red wine. Can I open it?”

“Eh? Well, probably...”

...Wait, I remember! That’s old wine Mom brought with her to enjoy! Not good, I’m looking at Pandora’s box right now. If she opened that now, Mom would definitely give me more than just an earful—

“Alright, I opened it.”

“Gyaaaaaah!”

It was too late. Konoe had already removed the cork, leaving the bottle open and a faint scent drifted from the opening.

“W-What’s wrong? Should I...not have opened it?”

“Well...I think that’s a wine bottle Mom really treasured...”

Wasn’t it pretty expensive? The label says...Mm, can’t read it. Can’t even make out what language this is.

“Urk...M-My apologies...I didn’t know it was something so precious.” Konoe lowered her head, sniffing like a puppy left in the rain.

My reaction must have been a shock for her, as she started tearing up a bit.

“.....!”

...Damn it. What’s this. Please, don’t look at me like you’re about to cry.

“...It’s fine.” I called out to her with as gentle of a voice as possible. “What’s happened has happened. If I properly explain things, Mom will surely understand.”

“R-Really...?”

“Yeah.” I showed as best and reassuring a smile as possible.

In reality, I have no idea. She might force me through some rigorous and hellish training again as a penalty, but that’s something I’m used to already. Not to mention that Konoe didn’t have any bad intentions about this. Can’t stand a girl looking like she’s about to cry.

“T-Then, will you forgive me?”

“Of course. I’m not angry or anything, and I’m also to blame for what happened.”

“You...don’t hate me now...?”

“Of course I don’t. What are you talking about?”

Out of a whim, I placed my palm on Konoe’s head, gently caressing it.

“...Mm.” There, Konoe finally looked at me again.



On my palm, I felt her soft and glossy hair. She looked up at me, like she was expecting something.

“Ah, sorry, I just...” I moved my hand away again.

Since I only touched her for a brief moment, my gynophobia thankfully didn’t activate.

“No, I didn’t really...”

Konoe was about to say something, only to lower her head again. Her expression now was different from before, embarrassed. And now, silence reigned.

“.....”

Crap, why did things turn so awkward now.

“S-So, what about that subtle seasoning you talked about? I think using wine should be fine.” I forcefully changed the topic.

I heard that people sometimes add wine into their curry, or even beef stew, so it should be fine.

“But, the problem is the age of the wine. It’s been back there for quite some time, I think.”

While shaking the red liquid inside the glass bottle, Konoe let out a suggestive ‘Hmm’. Following a few seconds of thinking...

“—Alright, let me have a taste.”

“Huh? Don’t do that, we’re still minors.”

“It’s fine, it’ll just be a small sip.” Konoe nonchalantly said, and poured some of the red liquid into a glass.

Will she be fine? I have some faint memories resurfacing in the back of my head, namely about Nakuru during the summer festival battle royale. Not that Konoe was stripped naked or anything, but it created a bit of a trauma to see people drunk.

“Nn.” After a bit of hesitation, Konoe took a sip of the wine. “...Yep, no problem with the taste.” Konoe tasted the wine like a cat sipping up milk.

If that’s the case, then you can stop taking sips already. You’re taking more than just a sip.

“Hey, that’s enough don’t you think?”

“Mm, what are you talking about? I’m perfectly fine.”

“Really now?”

“Yeah, definitely. If anything, my body feels all warm and fuzzy now.”

“.....”

Yeah, this is bad. The alcohol is doing its job. She’s slowly starting to sound sloppy.

“Alright, you got a taste, so let’s put the wine away for now.”

“Ah, what are you doing...!”

I took the wine bottle away from Konoe, who raised a voice of protest, and tried to take back the bottle of wine. However, the difference in height between us made it impossible. I feel like a father who forcefully took his daughter’s toy.

“Give it back! Give me back that bottle!”

“Hell no! You’re clearly getting drunk!”

“That...that’s not true at all. Just...”

“Just?”

“It felt like I won’t be able to live on without that.”

“Alright, I’m sending you to Alcoholics Anonymous preemptively!”

To think wine would work this easily on her! It made Subaru-sama its

captive!

“Hmpf. No need to doubt me, I’m not drunk at all.”

“The moment you said that, you pretty much confirmed that you’re drunk.”

“What are you talking about? Then, ask me any kind of question, I’ll give you the right answer and prove it to you.”

“.....What happened in 1192?”

“Japan sunk.”

“What kind of world are you talking about?!”

Ahhh, she’s done for if this continues. I need her to get sober again quickly.

“K-Konoe, let’s drink something cold instead of the wine, what do you think?”

Best would probably be some barley tea to freshen her up. With that thought in mind, I opened up the door of the fridge, but luck was not on my side, as we were out of barley tea. All that’s left is milk, I guess. Well, better than nothing.

“Here, Konoe, drink some milk.” I offered Konoe the pack of milk with one hand.

I just hope she recovers with this...

“...Hmpf.”

However, the second Konoe saw the milk I offered her, the color of her eyes changed. And, she started shaking.

“Don’t joke with meeee.”

“Eh?”

“I’m saying that you better take me seriouslyyyy! A butler like me would never get drunk because of some wineeeee!” She looked like a

father flipping over the table. “You and your...stupid milk! I drink it every daaaaay, and even so...”

“Even so?”

“I can’t win against Kana-chan at all...!”

“Huh?”

“~~~! Don’t bully peopleeee! I’ll show you what I do with milkyyy!” Konoe shouted.

She aggressively stole the pack of milk from me, and gulped it down. And after that was done, she took a deep breath.

“Wahaha! How’s that! The evil is goneeee! This is the true power of a butler!” Like a champion that just won the belt, Konoe held the empty pack towards the sky.

I still don’t see how this is related to being a butler, but fine.

“Still, this room is pretty hot. Is the aaaaashhiii working?” Konoe fanned some fresh air to her face.

How luxurious that would be. Sadly, our home’s kitchen doesn’t have such a wonderful function—but before I could even tell her about that.

“H-Hey! What are you doing!?”

“Huhhh? I’m taking off my clothes because it’s hoooooot~”

The tailcoat fell to the ground, the necktie was loosened, and Konoe eventually reached for the belt of her pants...

“Here...we go.” Together with that, her pants flew off too.

Waaaaaaaaaaaaah stop it you idiot! She’s doing some messed up strip show in my own home!

“Hm? What’s wrong, Jirou. Why’s your face so reeeeee?”

“!” I reflexively looked away from Konoe.

Even so, the sight of her slender, snow white legs would not leave my mind. Same was for her pale thighs. From her appearance, she resembled Kureha when I last seen her, but her adorable underwear showed from beneath her shirt...it's not that healthy for my rational thinking. Not to mention that she was wearing high-socks which didn't help.

“.....”

Crap, this irregular combination of long t-shirt and high-socks is dangerous. What a monochrome contrast, and not to forget about the underwear beneath that...

“...!”

D-Damn it, how can she be so cute. Before my reasoning gives in entirely, I need to make her get dressed again...!

“K-Konoe, at least wear your pants, okay?”

“Whyyy?”

“Why are you asking me that...”

“We're both guys, riiight?”

“You're a girl, remember!?”

“Heh, don't underestimate me. I'm a cross-dressing butler.”

“And how does that logic apply here!?”

“...Huh? Jirou, why are you wearing clothes?”

“Because that's the normal thing to do! Are your values messed up or something!?”

“Why is there so much fighting in this world...”

“Don't just change the topic to something serious!”

Draw the line when you're drunk! However, my retorts were met with no reaction, as Konoe raised both her arms into the air, twirling

around.

“It’s not that big of a thing to panic about~”

Gyaaaaaaah! Stop it already! I can see it! I can see something peeking out from beneath your shirt!

“...Shit.”

Now that it’s come to this, I have only one option left. In order to avoid even greater damage, I need to put away this wine immediately. Or, I should probably pour it out...

“Jirou, gimme back my wine!”

Seriously.

“No, that milk just now wasn’t nearly enough for meee.”

Waaah, don’t say that. Milk has lots of important calcium, it’s very healthy.

“If you’re not giving it back, then I have to take it by forceeee.”
Konoe started blushing, and approached me.

In this narrow kitchen, I had no room to escape to. Basically, she was closing in on me like a predator.

“Give it baaack! Give back the wineeee!”

“...! S-Stop it! Don’t come over here!”

I don’t think even a loan shark would be this assertive. However, because of the difference in height, Konoe is unable to reach the bottle, jumping up and down in front of me. Urk, so persistent...Like a stray cat begging for food.

“Give in, Jirouuuu.” Konoe said while closing in on me. “You can’t escapeee.”

“R-Really? I don’t see you overcoming this height difference between us anytime soon, you know?”

“...Heh, don’t underestimate butlerssss.” Suddenly, Konoe showed a deviant grin. “I’ll show you my new certain-kill technique...!”

“New...?”

“That’s right, I call it...’Butler Kosoto Gari!’”

“It’s just another judo skill!” I screamed, but it was too late.

With skilled leg movement, I was robbed off my balance, and fell to the floor. It was a clean point for the opponent.

“...!?”

Right after, all the red liquid inside the bottle was splashed onto my head. The bottle itself didn’t shatter, but the liquid came out nonetheless. Ahh, I feel like a serial killer covered with the blood of my victims.

“...Ah.”

I guess I somehow managed to empty out the bottle like I had planned to, but now Konoe gave me a really disappointed look...Wait a second?

“K-Konoe-san?”

Why is she sitting on top of me?

“.....What a waste...”

“Eh?”

What do you mean by that?—I wanted to ask, but wasn’t allowed to.

“...Mm.”

Almost as if she wanted to restrain me, Konoe pressed her body on me further. My sight was now filled by her, and her approaching facial features. Even her flowery scent tickled my nose. We both looked each other in the eyes, when she suddenly moved her face closer to my neck, drenched with wine.

“...Nn.”

There, she licked up the wine with her small red tongue.

“~~~! Y-Y-Y-You! What are you doing!?”

“I mean...it’d be such a waste.”

“That doesn’t mean you should just directly lick it off meeeeeee!?”

She was like a kitten, carefully licking up the milk from its container. Using her small tongue, Konoe tried to gulp up every small drop she could find on my neck. As a result of that, every touch of her tongue sent shivers down my spine. Because she was still drunk, her body felt warm, and her tongue even more so. It made my entire body feel like it was on fire. Following my neck was my collarbone.

“Nn...Mmm...” Konoe let out adorable voices with every lick, aiming directly for the small drops of red wine on my body.



“.....!”

This is bad. I felt goosebumps all over my body, and a warm sensation gathering at the tip of my nose. My gynophobia is getting close to activating. I expected this of course, considering how closely Konoe was clinging to me. Not to mention the soft sensation of her tongue. I’ve never experienced this before.

“Mm...Delicious...More...I want more...” Konoe had evolved from a small kitten into a vampire.

I grew worried that she might bite into my skin any second. However, she left it to only licking up the red liquid, audibly gulping it down.

“Guh...”

B-Big emergency, Captain! Even if she’s drunk, I didn’t expect the cold and sour Subaru-sama to do such a thing. Not forgetting about her current appearance that would normally be unthinkable. Ahh, so much stimulation...!

“K-Konoe, stop it...”

I used my last ounce of strength to try and reason with her.

“Come on...we’re best friends, right?”

“...Hmpf.”

“I think of you as the best possible friend.”

“~~~!”

“That’s why...just stop this already. You want to stay best friends with me, right? Then, in order to not make things awkward and break that relationship, can’t you just move away from...Ouch!?”

Suddenly, Konoe faintly bit into my skin with her sharp teeth. But, it was a soft bite, almost meant to be playful. It felt more like she was trying to protest about something. So she actually turned into a vampire now...I’m starting to feel like beef jerky or squid.

“No...just stop it already.” I pleaded, as my consciousness was starting to drift away.

However...

“...Shut up!” Konoe answered, while still biting into my neck. “This is all your fault for saying these things, Jirou.”

“Wha...these things? About us always being best friends?”

“~~~!”

“I mean, I get that it might be embarrassing, but weren’t you the one who brought it up? Not to mention that I’m embarrassed myself, and I still say that I want to be best friends with you, so why are you... Gyaaaaah!?”

I must have said something she didn’t like, because Konoe started biting again. She used more strength though, which in result heightened the pain, while still licking my skin with her tongue. This doesn’t make any sense. I don’t think I’m doing anything wrong here. All I did was emphasize what she wanted to hear. Is she trying to hide it out of embarrassment? If so, then munch on the crab sticks we have in the fridge.

“...Damn it.”

Either way, I’ll soon pass out because of my gynophobia. Before that happens, I need to get out of this situation...

“...Jirou.”

There, Konoe moved her mouth away from my neck, and looked at me. Her facial features were as beautiful as always, and because of the alcohol, her cheeks were flushed, her eyes looking melted. She’s evidently different from usual. And because of that, I felt something resembling a forbidden charm from her.

“...Jirouuu.”

Worse of all, she called out my name with a sweet voice. Her face reached up to me, close enough for our lips to touch...

“There’s...something I wanna tell you.”

“S-Something you want to tell me?”

“Yeah. That half-baked attempt before wasn’t good enough after allllll.”

She suddenly turned all serious, unbefitting of her previous attitude. Before...what is she talking about?

"Listen, this is very important." She took a deep breath, fully ignoring my confusion.

And then, as her translucent eyes looked at me, with her flushed face, she slowly formed her next words.

"I...am...your.....Mmnnn..."

"...Mmnnn?" I repeated the sound I heard.

Right after, Konoe's face fell down next to mine, and I heard faint and rhythmic breathing...It seems like she fell asleep.

"...Jeez." I let out a long sigh.

Either way...I'm saved. I carefully pushed away Konoe's body, and stood up. Waaah, the ground is covered with wine. I gotta change clothes and clean that up.

"Damnit, this butler." I muttered, while looking at the sleeping Konoe.

I guess I should carry her to the living room sofa for now.

"Up...we go." I lifted her body, using a princess carry.

In doing so, I yet again got to admire Konoe's cute face for a bit. However, I couldn't afford to take my time, as my gynophobia would be acting up again. I probably have ten seconds at best, considering what I previously went through. I gotta get her to the sofa before I suffer from a nosebleed. I managed to make it in time, thankfully to her being fairly light. Then again, Kureha is even more of a light-weight.

"Mmnn...Nnn..."

She was breathing faintly, but showed no signs of waking up. Oh yeah, she was about to say something back then, right? Well, it was probably something like 'I am your best friend', or something like

that. Well, guessing about it won't do me any good.

"Anyway." I looked away from the butler.

I mean, she's still not wearing any pants. Leaving her like that would be no good, so I brought the tailcoat from the kitchen, and gently put it over her body, covered by a blanket. I thought of putting her pants on her, but I don't have the guts to do that, gynophobia and all. I'll just pray that Konoe actually remembers what happened, otherwise she might get a really bad idea, thinking I attacked her.

"...Phew."

Anyway, that's one problem taken care of. Once I change clothes, I'll probably get a good nap like Konoe...or so I'd like to, but reality isn't as kind. After all, I have to take care of the curry in the kitchen, otherwise it'll ruin the food, and the finishing touches are still missing. In reality, a lot of problems were left unclear.

"...Alright."

Guess it's time for me to work hard. Konoe and I made this together, so I can't ruin it. In the end, I'm spending my time mostly alone, huh. In fact, I probably would have been fine just spending the day by myself. Then I wouldn't have had to suffer through another gynophobia attack, and hadn't gotten wine splattered on me. I would have been able to regret it through the last day of my summer break. And yet...

"Mmmm...Kana-chan...Jirou...I can't eat any more curry..." I heard faint muttering from the sofa.

It seems like she was having a blissful dream.

"....."

Well, you know. Today's the 31st of August. Ending this day with my best friend's smile isn't half bad.

"And to keep that smile, I gotta take care of this curry."

Gotta make this dream she's having a reality. Muttering these words

to myself, I tried my hardest for the sake of a single girl's smile.

1 Fictional character and protag from the TV series 24

Chapter 6: The Young Lady's Monologue

The 31st of August has arrived, and for all high school students in this country, this day has a very special meaning. Indeed, this is the last day of summer break, the final stretch before school restarts.

I think that's how my friend Jirou-kun would explain it. Ah, apologies for the late introduction, my name is Suzutsuki Kanade. Welcome to my room, I hope you have a joyful time today.

"...Just kidding." I let out a sigh, and fell onto my bed.

No need to introduce myself with nobody around. Normally I wouldn't do something like that to begin with, but today I was feeling a bit bored and melancholic. Anyway, my boredom won't go away like this, so I'll play a game to get a change of pace, and create some self-analysis.

I was resting in my own room. In terms of the average citizen, my family is quite prestigious, and my room was fitting that image, fairly luxurious. It's a wide open space, equipped with a dome bed, as well as several furniture imported from overseas. No matter how luxurious it may be, I've never thought much of it ever since I was young, and regarded it as normal. Of course, if I actually said this out loud, Jirou-kun would surely give me an earful.

Jirou-kun is my classmate. After being raised in a family with a little sister and mother who both are wrestling fanatics, his personality ended up twisted in a peculiar way. Then again, definitely not on the level of me and Usami-san. Thinking about it, a lot of events happened this summer, all including him. Most prominent of course the elopement trip I forcefully dragged him along on. That sure was fun.

Still, I didn't expect things to become this exciting, and my daily life to change to such an extent. The reason for this was the fact that

Jirou-kun found out my butler—Subaru's secret back in April. After that incident, everything changed. Everything is just so interesting, and fun, and enjoyable. Of course, there's me trying to create these events myself, but the fact that he always ends up getting wrapped up in trouble helps a lot.

When I'm with him, I never feel bored. For someone like me who can't live without excitement and joy, he's the greatest foe to my mortal enemy, namely boredom. That's why I often find myself wanting to be with him.

“.....”

If I were to confess something, this is the first time I ever felt this way towards a man. On a side note, my first love was my butler, Konoe Subaru. She was my first friend, my first irreplaceable existence. I love her even now, and that probably won't ever change. However, what I feel towards Jirou-kun is a different kind of emotion compared to that.

Not to mention that he's not just funny and interesting to have around. Normally he's a chicken who gets a nosebleed simply by touching a girl, but there are times when he actually is pretty cool. For example, during last Golden Week. Even after being run over by a truck, drenched in blood, he pushed me aside to convince Subaru with all his might...Seeing that was just so...impactful and stimulating. As a result of that, I went ahead and...well, k-kissed him...

Even I myself was wondering if I might have taken it too far, but I wanted to see his shocked face, and I figured this would lead to a more interesting result.

“But, it was my one and only first kiss...”

If possible, I wanted to have it in a more romantic situation. Usami-san would definitely take that direction instead. She's pretty girly despite her personality. Well, it's not like I regret much despite that. After all, I feel deep gratitude towards Jirou-kun. Thanks to his efforts, Subaru and I managed to make up, and go back to how we had been before. For that, I'm very thankful, and I feel bad for his

injuries back in April. That's why that kiss was something like a token of gratitude.

But, I feel like Nagare is also partially to blame because he ignored my orders back then. When I asked him about that, apparently there was a reason he was forced to do this, but I have no way of knowing. It was probably something about him being a clingy parent. Anyway, that's about enough self-analysis for now.

"Ah, not good."

I forgot the most important part as to why Suzutsuki Kanade is feeling quite melancholic right now. Put frankly, it's about my butler Konoe Subaru. Recently, she's been acting off a lot...

"Young lady, are you still awake?"

I heard a faint knock on my room's door, followed up by an alto voice. Hearing this, I immediately got up, and sat on my bed. And then, I flipped the switch something deep inside of me, which would turn me into the usual Suzutsuki Kanade.

"Yes, I'm awake. You can come in, Subaru." I answered with a calm voice so as to not raise any suspicion.

Looking over at the clock in my room, I could see that the time of day had progressed towards 11pm. Since the new school term starts tomorrow, we should be heading to bed soon.

"...Excuse me, young lady."

Subaru seemed tense about something as she entered my room. As always, she was absurdly loveable with her glittery hair, her translucent eyes, her slender stature, and her beautiful face.

"What's wrong? It's rare for you to stop by my room this late." I acted like I didn't know, but her expression and gestures told me enough.

I'm sure that tonight, all my doubts will be dispelled, even if I wanted them to or not. Tonight's dinner was far too abrupt. It was probably meant as a means. I know Subaru better than anybody else after all, but to think she would act like this...

“The thing is...I wanted to ask you for a bit of advice...” Subaru spoke up, her legs quivering like a newborn lamb.

...Hmm, there’s no need for her to be this nervous. We’re friends, not to mention the same age. I think her plan was to make me feel delighted with the dinner, all to make it easier for her. Jirou-kun keeps calling me a wolf, but now I really feel like my relationship with Subaru is that of a wolf and lamb. Of course, I wouldn’t say this out loud.

“Of course, tell me. But, you have to uphold your promise in return.”

“Urk...”

“What’s wrong? It’s simple, isn’t it?”

“...O-Okay...Kana-chan.”

“Fufu, thanks.”

What a nostalgic name that is. I’ve always asked her to call me that way when it’s just us two, but since she’s so diligent, she won’t listen to me. If I order her like I did just now, she would obey immediately, but it still fills me with a bit of sadness inside of me.

“Subaru, what did you want to talk about?”

I could roughly guess what she wanted to talk about. My money most definitely is on Jirou-kun.

“W-Well, the thing is...” Subaru continued with an awkward tone.

“Kana-chan, do you...like Jirou?”

“.....” I found myself surprised for a moment.

Of course, on the outside I stayed calm and rational, but on the inside, my heart was racing. My expectations were quite different from this reality in front of me.

“Now, who knows.” I smiled to buy myself some more time.

—Think, Suzutsuki Kanade. What’s most important right now is to be

considerate of Subaru. That's why the choice I went with was...

"—That's right, I like him."

"...!"

"Don't be so shocked. I do like him, but simply as a friend. I don't like him as a man or anything."

"I-I see...I was worried if that wasn't the case." Hearing my words, Subaru sighed in relief.

...Okay, it seems like my choice was correct. Leaving aside what is truth or lie, this is the best for now. Because, I knew what was coming after this...

".....There was a confession."

"Eh?"

"At the summer festival before, there was a confession."

"...Who?"

"Urk...I-I confessed to Jirou." Subaru blushed, while declaring such.

.....That chicken bastard, this isn't what you told me. How is this 'nothing happened'? I need to give him an earful first thing when I see him tomorrow.

"....."

But, something is off. Jirou-kun doesn't seem like the type of person who could lie to others. At least not to a level where I wouldn't realize...

"But...I actually failed."

"???" I tilted my head, unable to understand what Subaru was talking about.

Seeing me like this, Subaru explained how she said that staying as just friends was impossible for her. It was a confession in the heat of

the moment, but she grew scared of Jirou-kun's reaction, terrified of being rejected. She thought that if he said no now, they might not even be able to stay friends. Right when she reached that thought, she changed her 'confession' to 'I want us to be best friends'.

"...Hmmm." Hearing my butler's confession, I let out a sigh.

I see. That's why Subaru started acting so awkward around and concerning Jirou-kun. More than that though, this finally confirms it. I actually had a bit of a feeling in this regard, an assumption that things might be like this.

"So basically..." For now, I decided to tease my adorable butler a bit. "You like Jirou-kun, right?"

"!"

"Am I wrong?"

"N-No, I..."

"Ah, so you don't just like, but actually love him?"

"~~~!" Subaru's face turned as red as an apple, and she answered with a faint voice. "...Yes." She nodded.

...What kind of adorable living being is this. Oh no, now I want to tease her even more.

"I see. So then, whether you're awake or asleep, all you think about is Jirou-kun, hm."

"Urk..."

"All over him because of his charm?"

"Ugh..."

"Super mega ultra LOVE?"

"P-Please..."

"Let me guess, the advice you wanted would have played out as

follows. You'd ask me 'What should I do, Kana-chan. When I think of Jirou-kun, my body is burning up, and I can't sleep all night...!' followed by..."

"K-Kana-chan! That's enough!" Finally, Subaru seemed to have reached her limit.

Out of pure embarrassment, her entire body started blushing all over, as she pouted like a small child, saying 'Come on...you're such a bully, Kana-chan...'. Ahhh, she's so cute. Honestly speaking, I wanted to see even more of her adorable gestures like this, but I should probably stop. I'd just feel bad for her. And, there's more important things to talk about.

"...Kana-chan." Subaru spoke up with a quivering voice. "What should I do from now on...This is the first time I ever felt this way..."

"....."

"I was thinking of mustering up my courage to confess again, but...I can't. Just looking at Jirou-kun's face makes me...feel so embarrassed, and I become aware of my feelings for him...that I can't even talk properly with him."

"....."

"That's why, I'm lost on what to do...But, I can only talk about this with you Kana-chan, so...so...!"

"...I understand, Subaru." I gently took my butler's hands.

"K-Kana-chan...?"

"It's fine, Subaru. I'll...help you. I'll support you so that you can properly confess to Jirou-kun."

"B-But..."

"Are you feeling guilty because you're making your own master help you like this? You don't need to worry about that. After all...aren't we best friends too?" I whispered like a nursery rhyme, and embraced Subaru.

Silence followed, filling the room.

“...Thanks, Kana-chan.” Subaru gave honest words of gratitude.

...That’s right, this is fine. This is the best possible answer. After all, Subaru is an irreplaceable existence to me. As long as she’s happy, that’s all that matters. That’s Suzutsuki Kanade’s choice. Not to mention that playing cupid definitely won’t be boring. I could order her to do this and that, seeing her embarrassed side and enjoy it, and I bet Jirou-kun’s reactions would be a feast too. Well, I have to make sure they both reach a happy ending.

If there is but one irregularity in this situation...that would be Usami Masamune. I’m honestly bad at dealing with her. More than anything, I’m scared. She seems to be interested in Jirou-kun as well, so I need to be careful of her. Judging from the atmosphere between the two when I went to check them out, their relationship hasn’t progressed that far, so I shouldn’t be worried about this for now.

It’s fine. Everything will work out. After all, I am Suzutsuki Kanade.

“.....”

However, a part of me, one that I wanted to hide deep inside of me, was unable to accept this result. It’s almost like I myself am trying to stop this development. I find myself hesitating and accepting that what I’m doing is right. It feels like I’m trying to kill my own feelings. I wonder why, this is the first time I’ve felt this way. This kind of result should have been fine for me. It sounds exciting, interesting, and will make Subaru happy.

My judgement should not be wrong, and yet...I wonder why, there is this feeling of discomfort filling me. Almost like I’m committing a grave mistake here.

“.....”

But, I can’t keep feeling this conflicted. After all, today is the 31st of August, the final day of summer break. Starting tomorrow, the second term will begin. And then, I will have to interact with him again.

“.....”

What should I do, what should I do, what should I do, what should I do, what should I do, what should I do, what should I do, what should I do, what should I do, what should I do...After all. When it comes to Jirou-kun, I also...



Afterword

Been a while! I'm the author of [Mayo Chiki!] that's receiving an anime adaptation, Asano Hajime. So far, every time I wrote my afterword for the new volume, something crazy happened. First I lost my jacket, then I was hit by a truck, transported via ambulance, so I was terrified to see what awaited me this time, but it turned out to be a positive event! Yay! Anime!

At the same time, we reached the fifth volume of this cross-dressing butler romcom! This volume acted as a gateway from the summer break to the beginning of the second term in the shape of a short-story collection. Our summer ain't over yet!—is the image of this volume.

This might be a bit off-topic, but I always enjoyed short-story collections and the like. When I first met my dear editor, despite having just debuted, I was cheeky enough to say 'I want to write a collection of short-stories!'. Surprisingly enough, my editor was all on-board, saying 'Then we need to make sure your series continues long enough!', and I have nothing but gratitude for that.

Talking about gratitude, I want to give my usual thanks, starting with my editor Shouji-sama. Thank you very much for the band merch fan you sent me. Thanks to that, I managed to make it through this heat somewhat alive. Please continue to treat me well from now on too.

Can't miss Kikuchi Seiji-sama for the wonderful illustrations this time around as well. Thank you very much for providing your wonderful work during your busy times. Without you, [Mayo Chiki!] most certainly would not be the same without your help, and yet again you made me realize that I would not be here without you.

Following this, a big thanks to the editor-in-chief Misaka-sama, everybody from the editorial department, the proofreaders, the designers, the people involved with printing and selling, all the others who went drinking with me to give me tips and help, NEET-sensei who is responsible for the comicalization, and of course all my

readers supporting me.

It's all thanks to you that I can continue writing on [Mayo Chiki!]. I'm sure that I wouldn't have made it here on my own. With this fact in mind, I want to give it my best so as to not disappoint you.

Now then, moving on to the preview part of the afterword. With the 6th volume, we'll enter the second term. Summer break has ended, and their school life restarts. At the same time, their respective relationships start to evolve. At the same time, we will finally be introduced to the top-ranking student of the handicrafts club, so more and more chaos will ensue.

And, another piece of important information! A spin-off manga of the [Mayo Chiki!] has been greenlit for serialization! I will be responsible for the scenario, and the art will be provided by Eichi Yuu-sensei. The serialization will start this fall in the [Nyantype] (Kadokawa) magazine, telling the story of the servants working at the Suzutsuki Family. Of course, there will be Subaru and Kanade appearing here and there, as well as other new characters, so I hope you check it out.

Additionally, the first volume of the [Mayo Chiki!] will go on sale at the same time as the 5th volume of the light novel! You can't miss out on NEET-sensei's drawings! Also, the monthly serialization started in July, and now we're in October with the manga volume... So fast! NEET-sensei, thank you very much! For the first manga volume, I even wrote a short-story myself.

Now then, while praying that we get to see each other again, I'll be stepping on the gas to make the gasoline boil, and speed on ahead without any brakes holding me back, so I hope for your continued support.

Asano Hajime

Credits

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